

# RENFREW RIDES AGAIN



LAURIE Y. ERSKINE

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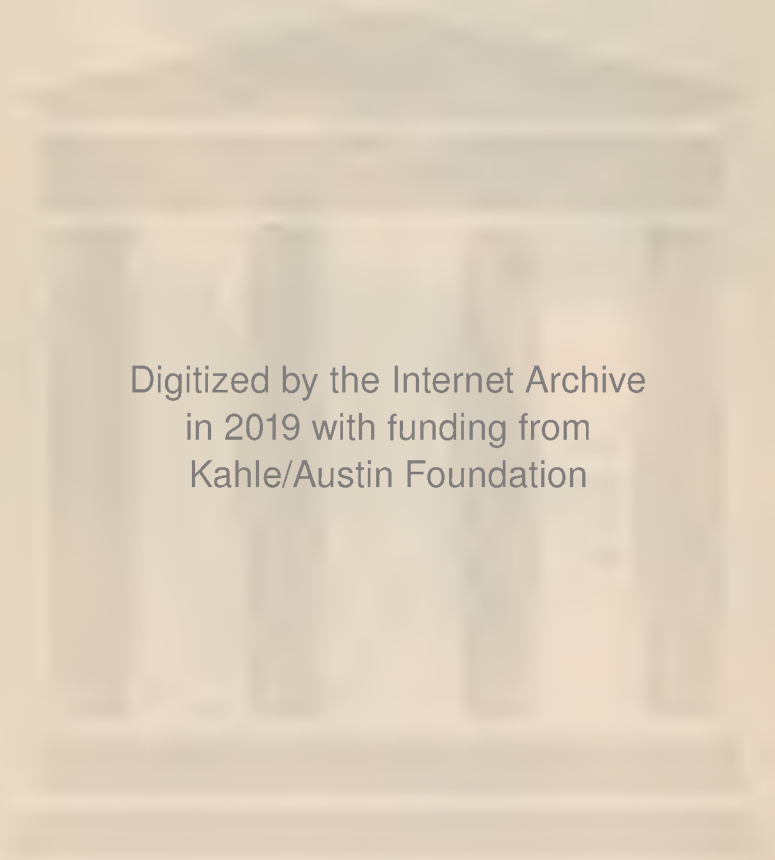


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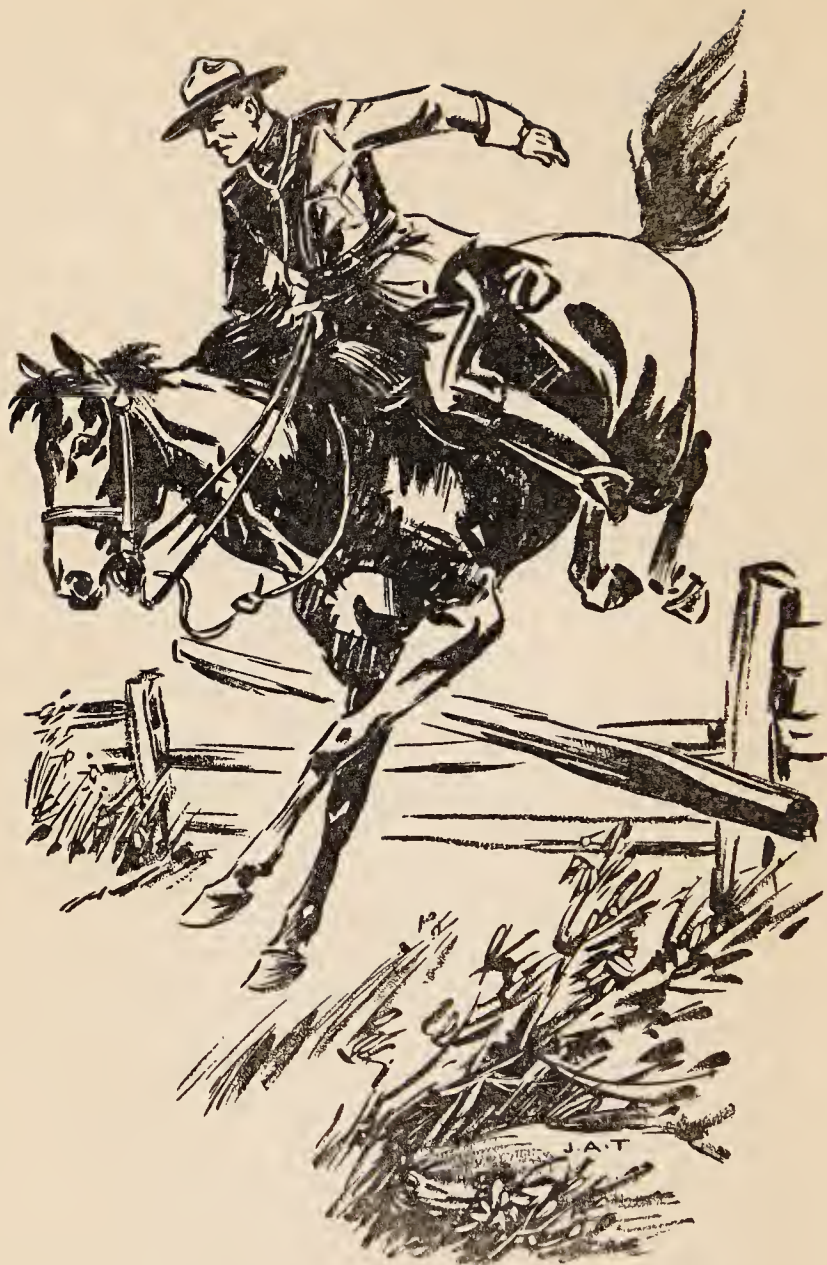




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# RENFREW RIDES AGAIN



*Renfrew thanked his stars that the bar had been loose.*  
*Renfrew Rides Again* *Frontispiece (Page 205)*

# RENFREW RIDES AGAIN

BY

LAURIE YORK ERSKINE

AUTHOR OF

"RENFREW OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED," ETC.

A K A

THE FREW

RIDES

AGAIN

GROSSET & DUNLAP  
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TO

GRIFFITH OGDEN ELLIS

WHO WITH FINE SYMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING,  
IN FRIENDSHIP, FAITH AND GENEROSITY, HAS  
MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR RENFREW TO EXIST  
IN THE MINDS OF THE BOYS OF AMERICA.

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## FOREWORD

*Some one has said that every man's life is, in itself, a story. This is true, and it was true of Renfrew; only Renfrew's life was made up of many stories. That was because Renfrew, in his youth, had been devoted to adventure, just as some young men are devoted to earning money, some to scholastic achievement, and some to the arena; just as some young men are devoted to doing nothing useful at all.*

*It was adventure which took Renfrew up to Canada. It was the call of adventure which led him to join the Royal Northwest Mounted Police; and when he came back to Walney, that suburb of a great city, it was the distant voice of all adventure which caused him to gather with the boys of Walney and retail to them the stories which those memories contained.*

*Because of this, two records exist of what befell Renfrew while he rode with the Mounted Police. He rides in crisp, clipped phrases through the official reports of the R.N.M.P. blue books, and he rides again, a gallant, scarlet-coated figure, with a brave and well-beloved countenance, through the hearts and minds of Alan MacNeil and all his comrades of those days at camp with Renfrew.*

*Since, in the tales he told the boys were a thousand memories of men and things and moments of deep feeling never to be erased; since these memories, invoked by the circle of believing faces which surrounded him as he told his stories, hold the precious human quality from which is woven the finest fabric of adventure, it is from the last-named record we will take our narrative, and see Renfrew as he rides again.*

LAURIE YORK ERSKINE.

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New Hope, Pennsylvania.



# RENFREW RIDES AGAIN

## CHAPTER I

### MURDOCK MAKES COMPLAINT

**R**ENFREW was riding over a yellow ocean of prairie land that was broken only here and there by sudden, rugged hills. . . . Approaching him from a far distance on the narrow dirt roadway was a buckboard, driven by a grocer. . . .

The buckboard appeared to Renfrew, as it followed the winding road toward him, like a moving toy which worked with fascinating perfection. He could see the intricate movement of the horse's legs as it quickened its pace suddenly at the driver's bidding, and he could see the spinning wheels of the buckboard very clearly; but distance made it diminutive.

To the grocer who sat in the buckboard, Renfrew might have even more easily appeared to be a toy; for his flaming scarlet jacket, the brilliant yellow stripe which lined his thigh, his flashing brasses and his polished leather strap-pings, all combined to make him suggest, from a distance, a gayly painted mannequin on horseback. But the grocer, whose name was Murdock, saw only that Renfrew was a policeman. A new policeman, to be sure, for this was among the first of his adventures; he was new to his post and comparatively new to the force. But he was a policeman, and this fact pleased Murdock, for at the moment Murdock ardently desired a policeman. He whipped his horse to a gallop.

Renfrew saw the grocer press his horse forward, and, conceiving that Murdock had urgent business for him, he spurred his chestnut mare to meet him. In this manner the grocer and the policeman met dramatically. Renfrew's horse prancing beside the road, while Murdock made the brake bar scream against his wheels to bring the buckboard to a halt.

"What is it?" cried Renfrew, performing masterful horsemanship.

"It's Lyfe!" squealed the grocer. His voice had the tone of a deep-voiced woman, and when excited he raised it to shrill heights. "I want to have him arrested!"

Renfrew gazed at him coldly. Murdock had a fat face and cold, beady eyes. Renfrew didn't like him.

"What's he done?" he demanded.

The grocer's eyes snapped vindictively.

"If you don't take him up quick," he cried, "the chances are he'll have done murder!"

"The truth!" snapped Renfrew. "Don't beat about the bush! What do you mean?"

"What I say! I've just come from his farm, and he's beating that boy of his to death!" His small eyes gleamed up at Renfrew with a mean sort of triumph in them. "I want you to get out there quick, and arrest him!"

Renfrew did not answer to that; he wheeled his mare about and set her galloping into the distance from which the grocer had emerged. Murdock grinned so that his fat face was wreathed with deep, soft folds. He grinned, and wheeling his buckboard in the road, he followed the bright figure of the policeman.

The farm on which lived the Irish cattleman named Lyfe was tucked away amid grassy hills some twelve miles from the settlement of Sagrinay, Alberta, and about seven miles from the spot where Renfrew met the grocer. Renfrew



made that seven miles in something less than twenty-five minutes, which is good time, considering the weight of his equipment. And since, in telling this story to Alan MacNeil and the boys of Walney, he always took advantage of that twenty odd minutes to tell them what he had already known about Desmond Lyfe, we will take the same advantage and do likewise.

Desmond Lyfe had come to Canada because he was no man to tolerate a master; and, like most men who falsely resent obeying a superior, he could not tolerate even himself in this capacity. His was an ungovernable and overbearing spirit. Men who worked for him learned to hate him; men who hated him learned, as quickly, to fear him also.

There were some who worked for him and received no pay, for Lyfe had been very successful in his farming and lent money freely to whoever possessed a profitable farm or business. When those who owed him money could not pay, it was the custom of Desmond Lyfe to take over the farm or business for himself. The unfortunate debtor might continue to work it, but it was Lyfe who pocketed the proceeds. It was no secret in Sagrinay that unless Murdock was able to pay Lyfe the large sum he owed him, Lyfe would take over at the end of the month the grocer's store at the settlement. But that had nothing to do with Lyfe's habit of beating his boy.

The boy, Scott McLeod, called variously Scotty, Cloudy or Mac, was an orphan whom Lyfe had apparently adopted from no other motive than that of thrift. As the boy grew older and turned out to be one of the slight, fair sort, lacking the sturdy frame and bulky muscular development which make the efficient farm hand, Lyfe moodily realized that he had made a bad bargain. He had intended to profit by the constant presence of a boy on his farm by making the

boy do the work of two men. As it was, Scotty McLeod stopped short of the work of one man, and he had a great appetite. Lyfe, incensed at this injustice, took out his ill feeling on the boy.

When Scotty, completely tired and overworked, refused point blank some job which Lyfe was accustomed on such occasions to give him, Lyfe would become abusive. He had a rare way of insulting any one in his power, and Scotty, you will remember, was tired out. It was ten to one that Lyfe would go too far with his abuse and then Scotty, slight, fair-haired, pink-cheeked and tired out, would flare up against him. Lyfe would taunt him until the boy's fury became, in its turn, insulting; he had a dangerous way of telling Lyfe the truth about himself in such moments; then Lyfe would beat him.

He never broke Scotty's spirit, but he bruised it, so that Scotty seldom knew the desire to smile, and was tortured constantly with an inward hurt. It always hurts inwardly when you hate a man.

Renfrew had met Scotty in his patrol of the district, and, from other lips, he had heard of the beatings which the boy received. Renfrew was one of the few human beings who knew what Scotty looked like when he smiled, but the boy would never tell him of the beatings. For this reason, Renfrew could only wait for an opportunity to catch Lyfe in the act of ill treating the boy, or hope that some witness to the man's brutality might overcome his fear of Lyfe sufficiently to complain against him. Renfrew could not interfere with Lyfe unless he received a complaint; therefore he felt a certain satisfaction as he galloped away in answer to Murdock's alarm, for, whatever may have moved the grocer to betray Lyfe to the police, it seemed that he had at last given Renfrew a chance to take Scotty away from the man who persecuted him.

As he approached the farm, Renfrew quite naturally pictured to himself what the situation would probably be. Murdock had suggested that Lyfe was beating the boy with unusual severity. That was no doubt an exaggeration. Still, it was probable that the boy himself would be sufficient evidence against Lyfe to justify Renfrew in making the man give him up. He pictured the scene which would greet him. The boy, no doubt, would be hiding his rage and humiliation in some distant place. Lyfe would be fuming with ungovernable rage—where? It occurred to Renfrew that he must approach cautiously. At the sight of the policeman's uniform Lyfe might run away, or offer resistance. . . . He might even be watching for Renfrew's coming. . . .

Renfrew swung around the little eminence which screened Lyfe's house from the road, and reined in his mare, completely surprised by the strange employment of Desmond Lyfe and Scotty McLeod, as the turn of the road revealed them to him.

Lyfe was not occupied in beating a boy, or running away, or watching for the police. Scotty McLeod was not engaged in concealing pain, rage, or humiliation, and neither the boy nor the man noticed immediately the coming of Renfrew; the gaze of both was fixed upon still another man.

Lyfe was seated upon a wood chopping block, and he sat with his knees wide apart, his hands on either knee, and his body bent forward. The boy sat on the roof of a woodshed and spoke to Lyfe while he gazed at the third person. This was a gigantic man with a frame as powerful as it was tall, who seemed planted in front of Lyfe and who leaned a little forward so that the ax he held by its handle could rest upon the ground.

Upon this man, whose back was turned to Renfrew, Lyfe was glaring with a passionate and unquenchable rage. The

fact that he glared in silence made his anger only more apparent, and the voice of the boy seemed to feed that anger as fuel feeds flame.

"He saved your life!" cried the boy, as Renfrew rode into the scene. "If you'd hit me with that, I'd have killed you!" His voice sounded very clear and high in the prairie air, and to Renfrew it flavored the scene with a queer suggestion of boys playing Indian; Scotty delivered his words with such boyish ferocity and deep earnestness.

"Put down that ax, while ye may, Barto!" roared Lyfe. "If ye let that rat of a boy speak another word at me, I shall not forget it."

"Don't worry!" sang out the boy from the woodshed roof. "You'll never hear another word out of me. I shall never come back here again!"

"Then go quick!"

Renfrew was surprised at the resonance of the giant's voice. It rang out in the air like the boom of a great drum, and it had nothing of kindness in it. It was more like a threat, as though he ordered Scotty to go under penalty of some dreadful punishment he had it in his power to inflict.

"Go now!" he cried. "I am not doing this for you, rat boy. In a little while I shall let Lyfe get up, for he has something I want to take with me."

"When I get up," snarled Lyfe, "you will take nothing with you but regrets."

The giant raised the ax.

"I could split your thick head with this," he boomed.

"Drop that ax!" cried Renfrew.

With amazing presence of mind the gigantic man leaped sideways and away from Lyfe, hurled the ax a great distance from him, and turned to face Renfrew. In this movement he managed to obey the policeman's command without



giving Lyfe the opportunity to get home the blow which the Irishman drove at the place he had occupied an instant before Renfrew spoke. Seeing Renfrew's uniform, Lyfe didn't follow up his attack, but stood, suddenly impassive, and stared at the redcoat.

Renfrew did no more than glance at the Irishman's bearded face for, as the giant turned, Renfrew had been startled by a sight he was never able to forget.

The giant was a black man. That is to say, the color of his face was dark to the point of blackness, yet he was obviously not a negro, for his high cheekbones and long skull, his heavy Roman nose and long, thin lips, appeared more like the features of an Indian. It was this combination of rugged, barbaric features and black complexion which startled Renfrew; or perhaps it was the man's eyes, for they burned like twin coals, very close together.

"Mr. Renfrew," Lyfe's voice trembled under his effort to quiet it, "this man is a hold-up. Arrest him."

The giant revealed a flash of shining teeth, as he laughed in the other's face. With one hand he waved toward the roof of the woodshed where Scotty still sat, intently regarding the scene.

"He was going to whip a little boy," boomed the giant. Renfrew turned toward the boy.

"That right, Scotty?" he cried.

"Ask Lyfe," said the boy in answer.

"Is that true, Mr. Lyfe?" Renfrew asked.

Lyfe swore.

"He's a lying young scoundrel!" he cried. "He steals food."

"Come down here, Scotty!" ordered Renfrew.

As the boy dropped lightly from the woodshed to the ground there was a sound of wheels in the roadway and Murdock drove up.

"Have you arrested him?" cried Murdock spitefully.

Renfrew ignored him, so the grocer concerned himself with a wondering examination of the big black man.

"Now, tell me the truth, Scotty." Renfrew dismounted to address the boy more closely.

Scotty, who, although fifteen years old, had no more height than the average boy of thirteen, gazed directly into Renfrew's eyes as he responded.

"I needed food," he said, simply. "Lyfe was in the front of the house quarreling with Mr. Murdock, so I went into the pantry and took some. Lyfe heard the dishes rattle, I guess, and he was in a bad mood. He left Mr. Murdock and chased me. When he caught me he took me outside and got the buggy whip. Mr. Murdock got scared, I guess, and rode away." (This with a glance of ineffable mockery toward the grocer who had abandoned him when he most needed help.) "Then I tried to get away from Lyfe, and he tried to get me with the whip. I grabbed the ax, because I wanted to hit him with it, but this coon came out of the barn and took it away from me. Then Lyfe let me go, and the coon made him sit and listen to what I had to say."

Renfrew gazed at him reflectively.

"Why did you do that?" he asked the black man suddenly.

The giant looked fondly at Lyfe.

"To make him suffer!" he blurted out.

"What were you doing in the barn?"

"I slept there."

"You knew it?" Renfrew turned to Lyfe.

"No," snarled Lyfe. "Didn't I tell you he was a hold-up? Put him in the jug."

The black man spoke to Lyfe then, with a singular dignity.

"That would be very bad for you," he said. "You have gone too far already. This would be bad for you."

Renfrew examined them thoughtfully.

"I am making a complaint against Lyfe!" squealed the grocer. "I want you to arrest him."

So Renfrew made his decision.

"I'm going to take the boy away with me, Lyfe," he said. "There's no love lost between you, and you can't treat him like a human being."

Lyfe flared up at that.

"You'll do nothing more than your duty, Mr. Renfrew!" he roared. "And that will be to clear out of here! I withdraw my complaint against this man, and Murdock, the fool, has no complaint to make. Therefore you are intruding. Get off my land!"

"You interrupted me," pursued Renfrew firmly. "I am taking the boy off your hands. This man here will go into Sagrinay with me, for I have some questions to ask him. Have you a conveyance, Mr. Lyfe?"

"You take that boy away from here," fumed Lyfe, "and I'll see that you leave the force! You have no authority to stand between a man and his adopted son!" Considering how little love he bore Scotty, he seemed surprisingly reluctant to lose him.

"That you can arrange later," said Renfrew. "The boy goes with me. I'm asking you for a conveyance."

"Take it yourself," snarled Lyfe. "If you kidnap the boy, you needn't hesitate to steal a horse and buggy."

"I'll saddle my pony," said Scotty suddenly, and as suddenly he ran away into the barn.

Flushing with anger, Lyfe would have followed him, but catching Renfrew's eye thought better of it.

"How will you get your prisoner in?" he sneered.

"He's not my prisoner," said Renfrew, turning to the giant black man. "I only want to question you," he assured him. The big man stared back impassively into the red-

coat's eyes. "You will be my guest until you are ready to go."

"I'll take him into Sagrinay," piped the grocer. "There's room for him in the buckboard."

Scotty appeared at this, and mounted his piebald pony even as he emerged with it from the barn. Renfrew thought quickly.

"Don't worry," Murdock assured him. "He won't get away from me."

Renfrew glanced at him in quick surprise. The big black man possessed, even in Renfrew's eyes, an aspect of sinister strength. He did not believe the grocer had so much pluck as his offer to ride with the giant indicated.

"Will you go with him?" he asked the black man.

The big fellow looked at the grocer with impassive scorn.

"Why not?" he boomed; and again the resonance of his voice and the crisp nicety of his diction caught Renfrew unawares.

"Very well," he said. "Let me know your name."

"John Barto," snapped Lyfe, quickly.

The black man turned his head so that his gaze burned into Lyfe's eyes. His own were smoldering again.

"That right?" demanded Renfrew.

"Yes." The big man swung on Renfrew impassively. He moved with the deliberate purpose of a great animal, conscious of its power.

"Where do you come from?" Renfrew was making notes.

"Nome," boomed Barto surprisingly. "I thought I was to answer your questions at Sagrinay?"

Renfrew snapped his notebook together and slipped it into his pocket. He turned to mount.

"You will bring him to the post at Sagrinay," he said to Murdock, and there was a quiet command in his voice.

"I'll be right behind you," said Murdock.

## *MURDOCK MAKES COMPLAINT*

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"In front of me," corrected Renfrew.

He waited while Barto mounted to the buckboard, and then, as the vehicle wheeled into the road, he turned in beside the boy on the pony, following it.

"You will answer to me for this!" roared Lyfe, behind him. But Renfrew merely waved one hand.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DEATH OF LYFE

**B**Y the time Renfrew and his cavalcade arrived in the settlement of Sagrinay, he had decided upon the course he would pursue. The man, Barto, he could not hold, unless Lyfe filed a complaint against him; but he could question Barto and solve something of the mystery underlying the man's sinister words against Lyfe. Meanwhile he must protect the boy. That, he decided, must come first. So he left Murdock and the great black man at the post, instructing the grocer to await his return for luncheon, and made his way with Scotty to the office of MacKeaver, the probate judge, whose duty it was to protect the widow and the orphan.

MacKeaver was a dour, beetle-browed old Scotchman, who maintained his position rather by virtue of the fact that he knew the private affairs of everybody in his district, than because of any legal knowledge he possessed. To Renfrew's disgust the hard-bitten old man had no sympathy for Scotty at all.

"It would be a fine thing," he roared after confusing the boy with a volley of bullying questions. "A fine thing if no man could give a lazy, thieving rogue a taste of the rod without the police interfering!"

"There is a complaining witness," said Renfrew coldly.

"And who is that?" demanded MacKeaver.

"Mr. Murdock, the storekeeper."

"Murdock!" His honor's voice burst forth sarcastically.

"The one man in the province who would wish to see Lyfe



ruined or dead! Would ye take the word of him? I tell ye, Mr. Renfrew, ye had better not interfere with the domestic affairs of the private individual. Do not be courtin' ruin just to save a lazy boy a thrashing."

"And you, for your part, Judge MacKeaver, will please leave my own business with me. What disposal shall we make of this boy?"

"Send him back to Mr. Lyfe. We have no right to interfere." His honor's eyes snapped balefully over his glasses.

"I think not," said Renfrew.

Judge MacKeaver threw himself back in his chair, whipped off his glasses, and glowered upon this rebellious redcoat.

"If ye do not take him back," he said, "I shall write out a court order that ye do. Will you take the consequences of disobeying that?"

"I will take any consequences that may result from doing the right thing," said Renfrew. "A man can do no less."

"At Regina they will not think it is part of your duty to conflict with the local authorities. You can be suspended from the force for that."

"That's a small thing compared to what the boy must put up with if he goes back to Lyfe."

The judge turned away from him with a gesture of disgust.

"Have yer way," he growled. Then to Scotty: "Is it not enough that ye repay Mr. Lyfe's generosity with stealing," he said sternly, "but ye must see a man ruined in defending yer as well?"

"No," said Scotty. And his blue eyes flamed with the spirit which was in him. "I'm going back."

"No, you're not," said Renfrew.

"I am!" cried Scotty. "I'm going back now. I've been

treated like live stock long enough. I'm going back and if Lyfe illtreats me again, I—"

His small body was tense with feeling as he said this, and the tensivity of it emphasized the words he left unsaid.

"Ye will do what?" sneered MacKeaver.

"I can take care of myself!" said Scotty; and it surprised Renfrew to hear the deep, manlike resolution in the boy's voice.

Renfrew placed a hand on Scotty's shoulder.

"Come with me," he said firmly. "We'll talk it over."

"No!" Scotty wriggled from his grasp. "I'm going back alone. Now! I can take care of myself, I tell you!" And twisting away from Renfrew's side, he was off down the stairs.

"MacKeaver," cried Renfrew, then, "you've done a poor thing now!"

MacKeaver laughed, dourly.

"How's that?" he asked.

"You've traded a boy's happiness to uphold brute force."

Without waiting for his honor's reply, Renfrew followed the boy, but when he reached the streets of Sagrinay, Scotty, he found, had disappeared, and so had the piebald pony. He mounted the chestnut mare and returned to the police post. No one was there.

Renfrew was now undecided what course to pursue. He had still to question the man, Barto, and he wished to do that at once, for he was suspicious of the gigantic black man, and it was important that Barto lost no respect for the police. Yet Barto was gone. Renfrew guessed that Murdock had taken him away to lunch with him, and Murdock's home was on the other side of the settlement. It seemed as though he would have to make his way there, rebuke the grocer for his indifferent coöperation with the law, and get what he could from Barto. But he had in his

mind the boy, Scotty, and how Lyfe would greet him upon his return to the farm. It seemed to Renfrew that Scotty would have need of a friendly presence when Lyfe welcomed him home.

A tow-headed boy in overalls came to the post at that moment and pounded on the door. Renfrew let him in.

"Mr. Murdock asked me to tell you that he's got the big man to lunch with him. He says he'll bring him over afterward."

"When did he tell you this?" asked Renfrew.

"'Bout half an hour ago," said the boy. "How do yer shoot that gun?"

"With a big noise," said Renfrew, who was adjusting the weapon at his belt. "Here's a nickel. You tell Mr. Murdock that I'll be back here at three o'clock."

The boy's message had decided him. He would follow Scotty now, and deal with the black man later. To get out to the farm before Lyfe had the opportunity to injure the boy, he must hurry. This thought was uppermost in his mind as he mounted the chestnut mare and set out, cantering, for the open prairie. As he remembered the details of that scene with Lyfe; the figure of Barto looming before the Irishman with ready ax, and the slight form of the boy upon the woodshed roof, he quickened the pace of his mount, for he recalled the impression which Lyfe's face, suffused with anger, had made upon him. It had been murderous—that was the impression he had gained. And the boy was not a coward. Scotty would fight. "I can take care of myself!" he had cried. . . .

Renfrew spurred his mare to a gallop. If the boy opposed his puny violence to Lyfe's great anger, it was not pleasant to reflect upon what might happen. . . . He must hurry. He should not have let the poor kid go alone.

The hoofs of the chestnut mare made dull thunder on the

## *RENFREW RIDES AGAIN*

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dirt road. The wind whistled and hummed in the rider's ears.

As he rounded the little knoll which hid the farm buildings, Renfrew unbuttoned the holster of his revolver. As he came in sight of the farm, he drew up the chestnut mare sharply. And he vaulted from the saddle in one bound. For the sight which greeted his alert gaze was the sight of Lyfe, stretched dead on the grass before his barn. There were two bullet wounds in his chest.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GUN AND THE CLOSET

**I**N the half hour following his discovery of Lyfe's body, Renfrew had made a fairly complete examination of the barn, house and grounds. He had discovered the twin wounds which told of two bullets quickly fired into Lyfe's broad chest; he had examined the wounds without moving the body from the position in which he had found it, and he had carefully gone over the ground about the yard, seeking whatever tracks the murderer might have left. He was still engaged in this occupation when the scrape of iron-bound wheels drew his attention to the road. It was Mr. Justice MacKeaver in an antiquated buggy.

"Wait a minute!" cried Renfrew. "Don't drive in any further!"

Seeing Lyfe's body and Renfrew's position on his knees in a wagon road which led from the farm yard into the hills, MacKeaver very intelligently drew his horse to a halt and climbed down.

Renfrew arose and came to his side.

"You came about the boy?" he asked.

"I hope I know my duty," growled MacKeaver. He had come to investigate more thoroughly the story Renfrew and the boy had told. "Where is he?"

"Gone," said Renfrew gravely. He had searched the house and barns for some traces of Scotty, and all he had found was the overalls Scotty had worn that morning, evidently thrown aside when he donned clothes more suitable for travel. The piebald pony was gone.

MacKeaver was gazing grimly at the corpse.

"He killed him?" he asked incredulously.

Renfrew frowned.

"I found Lyfe just as you see him," he said.

MacKeaver's eyes were running eagerly over the scene.

"Is that the gun?" he asked. He was pointing to a thirty-two repeating rifle which seemed to have been thrown on a weather blackened deal table that stood beside the porch. As he spoke he stepped toward it.

"Don't touch it!" snapped Renfrew, coldly. "I'm working out something which depends upon its exact position. Do you want to help me find the murderer?"

"I am at your disposal, Mr. Renfrew, and you know it," said MacKeaver.

"Then ride into town as quickly as possible. Take my horse if you like. Wire to Starnes and Tysonville and have them stop the boy if he tries to take a train at either of those points. I think he will. Then bring me the coroner and bring me Murdock and the man he has with him; a big black man named Barto. I want them to drive out in Murdock's buckboard, and I want you to send some disinterested person into Murdock's store to buy me some of these." He scribbled hastily in his notebook, tore out the page, and gave it to MacKeaver. "Do you understand?"

MacKeaver grinned sourly as he read what Renfrew had written.

"Humph," he growled. "Some disinterested person?"

"Yes, anybody in Sagrinay who could not possibly have heard about this. Let that be the first thing you do."

"I shall take your horse," said MacKeaver; and Renfrew, who had thoroughly disliked the old man for his devotion to the hard code which life had taught him, now felt grateful that he had so reliable a messenger; for he knew that the



same hard code would cause MacKeaver to see his orders carried out if he had to carry them out by force.

He saw MacKeaver go, and returned again to the examination of the things Lyfe had so pitifully left behind. Especially he paused over the mute testimony of Scotty's overalls. They lay, hastily discarded, upon a cot in what was evidently a living room in which the boy had slept. Beside the fireplace of that room was a narrow cupboard, which had been left open. In that cupboard were two shot guns, several boxes of cartridges, some oily rags, and various articles of use in cleaning firearms. It was obviously the cupboard from which the rifle had been taken. Renfrew examined this cupboard thoroughly. He saw the cartridge box from which the ammunition had been snatched, lying open on its side. He saw a wire pull-through which had been dragged from the cupboard as the rifle had been snatched forth, and he noticed how the wire strand had rebelliously resisted an obvious effort to replace it. He closed and opened the door, finding that when closed it fitted so neatly as to make almost imperceptible the fact that the cupboard existed. He carried his investigation to the finest details of the house and grounds, making many notes in his book; making many careful calculations.

It was dim evening when the complete loneliness in which he had been doing this work was terminated by the arrival of Murdock and the gigantic black man. Renfrew was out in the yard, where he sat in a kitchen chair and gazed reflectively upon a scene which he conjured in his mind against the background of the grassy barnyard with the rifle still lying near the porch, agleam in the brazen glow of the sinking sun, and Lyfe inert in a posture queerly twisted, an ironic denial of his name.

They rode upon horseback, the grocer on a wiry dun

pony, and Barto strikingly astride of a large white mare. Renfrew greeted them coldly; he had been explicit in demanding the buckboard.

"Where's MacKeaver?" he asked.

"He's coming on with the doctor," piped Murdock. "Good God! What's this?" He gazed in consternation at the corpse.

"Lyfe's been shot," said Renfrew shortly.

Murdock dismounted gingerly and turned at once to the rifle.

"With that!" he exclaimed. Then, "Where's the boy?"

"That's what MacKeaver said," snapped Renfrew. "Why?"

Murdock stood on the porch, looking down at the gun.

"Why?" he squealed excitedly. "Why?" He stooped as though to pick up the rifle.

"Leave it alone!" ordered Renfrew. "I asked you why you spoke of the boy."

Murdock glanced at Barto who had dismounted and strolled toward them.

"Well," he said, still gazing at the black man. "He said he would kill Lyfe, and it looks like he's done it."

It occurred to Renfrew that Murdock had not known that Scotty had gone back to the farm.

"I had the boy with me," he said. "You know that."

Murdock appeared for a moment disconcerted.

"But MacKeaver said he came back," he blurted out.

"Even if he did, is it likely a boy of fifteen would commit such a crime as this?"

"It is no crime," boomed the voice of Barto. "Lyfe deserved to be killed. The boy shot him in self-defense."

Renfrew swung on him.

"So you think it is the boy, too," he said. And his voice was very calm and reasonable.

"Of course," said Barto, calmly. "Who else but Lyfe and the boy would know where to find the gun?"

Renfrew was surprised. That was a thought which had occurred to him, but he had not expected Barto to remark on it.

"Why not?" he asked quickly.

"Well, do you know where it was kept?" asked Barto; and his dark eyes glowed upon Renfrew's own with a queer, searching light.

"Yes," said Renfrew. "I found out where it was kept."

"That is because some sign was left. Few men keep their guns where another can readily find them. I should say that if no sign had been left you would have had to search a long time before you found the place."

"You are right," said Renfrew. "It's a queer thing that—"

He was interrupted by an exclamation of anger from Murdock, and with the sound of it came the sound of wheels and horses. It was MacKeaver and Doctor Lindley, the coroner, who arrived in Murdock's buckboard, drawn by MacKeaver's horse.

"I told you that buckboard could not be used!" squealed Murdock, excitedly.

"Why not?" demanded Renfrew quickly.

For answer Murdock stared at him as though nonplussed.

"Because a tire on the right hind wheel is broken through," explained MacKeaver, in the grocer's place. "But you said you wanted it, so I brought it." He grinned his sour grin as he spoke, and Murdock glared back at him with great malice in his little eyes. The black man turned his gaze upon Renfrew, staring down from his great height into the redcoat's face, as though he sought something there.

The doctor leaped from the buckboard and immediately set about examining the body. He pulled back the heavy

shirt Lyfe wore, and probed about the wounds which were thus laid bare. The others watched him in silence, save for the murmur of MacKeaver's voice as he reported to Renfrew the results of his mission. The doctor arose, finally, and Renfrew quickly knelt in the place he had deserted, and arranged the body once more in the position it had taken when the bullets brought it down.

"What do you find, Doctor Lindley?" he asked as he arose.

"Death was caused by two steel capped thirty-two caliber bullets," said the coroner, gazing at something in his hand. "You have the gun?" He handed Renfrew the thing he had been fingering. It was a leaden pellet, capped with steel. "This passed through his body," he said coolly. "And emerged in the lower part of the back."

"Here's the gun," piped Murdock.

Renfrew walked with the doctor to the porch and, picking up the rifle, laid carefully in its place a stick of wood. The doctor examined the weapon, and nodded.

"That is the gun," he said. "And I understand you have the criminal. I should like to have the body for further examination, Mr. Renfrew."

"What makes you understand we have the criminal?" asked Renfrew frowning.

"MacKeaver has told me of the boy."

"But it was not the boy," Renfrew spoke very sharply. It incensed him that a group of men who would have hesitated to place the blame for this grave crime upon any man without careful investigation should leap so readily to the conclusion that it had been committed by a boy.

"That boy is innocent. I'd stake my reputation on it!" he cried.

"Why do you not show the coroner where the gun was kept?" boomed Barto.

They all turned to the black man in surprise. His voice was so authoritative; his great bulk and grave, dark face, so imperative, that he commanded their respect.

"What is this about the gun, Mr. Renfrew?" asked the coroner.

Renfrew led them into the house and showed them the cupboard. It was closed, and in this condition was so nearly invisible that all except Renfrew were plainly surprised when he revealed its whereabouts by opening it.

"It was Lyfe's gun closet," he said.

"Lyfe and the boy lived here alone," said Barto in his deep, grave voice. "Picture a stranger to this house quarreling with Lyfe. He seeks some weapon with which to injure him. Is it probable that he would go quickly to this cupboard and get a rifle?"

He paused, watching the effect of his words.

"No," he cried resonantly. "But the boy would do it by instinct!"

"What's this?" asked the coroner. He held in his hand a single, pitiable garment.

"Scotty's overalls," said Renfrew. "He wore them in the morning. He evidently changed to other clothes before he went away."

There was a long silence.

"I think," said the doctor, dryly, "that to solve this murder, we have only to wait until we get that boy."

"Perhaps," said Renfrew quietly. "But a great deal can be done by such imaginative and deductive methods as our friend here has already brought to bear." He indicated Barto by addressing him. "Do you think you could go further?" he asked. "Do you think you could construct an even more detailed picture of the crime than the glimpse you have given us?"

The black man looked down upon him with a steadiness



and dignity which again commanded the attention of them all.

"Yes," he said. "The boy returned and Lyfe greeted him with anger. He is a dangerous man in such fits as that, and the boy knew it. He, too, has that passion; that spirit which a man like Lyfe cannot break. Lyfe tried to beat him, and the boy runs into the house. He instinctively snatches the gun from the closet, and dashing out from the house, shoots Lyfe down. Can you not see?"

Renfrew, who had gazed at Barto, while he talked, quite as gravely as the rest of them, now slowly smiled.

"How do you know the boy returned?" he asked.

Barto stared at him silently. Renfrew turned on Murdock.

"You have explained that," he said. "Mr. MacKeaver told you, didn't he?"

"I did not," said MacKeaver, stolidly.

"No?" smiled Renfrew. "Well, we'll have to come back to that. Now, as far as Mr. Barto's story is concerned, I can only see one important error. But that one is very important. It is the most important element in the entire business—"

Barto gazed upon him now with a steady gaze which was a challenge.

"That gun was not snatched hastily from the closet," snapped Renfrew. "It was not even snatched from the closet instinctively. It was taken deliberately from the closet by a man who searched carefully for the place it was kept. And it was not taken out of the closet until after Lyfe was dead!"



## CHAPTER IV

### THE HORSE AND THE WHEEL

**A**T the policeman's words Barto turned, not upon Renfrew, but upon the men about him, as though to say, "What foolish words are these?" But the men about him had eyes only for Renfrew.

"Look about you!" cried Renfrew. "Can't you see that cupboard, open in the corner? Can't you see where a man has stood upon a chair to peer onto that shelf above the window? See, there is mud upon it. Don't disturb it, but mark it in your mind, Dr. Lindley! That dab of mud is important! There are other evidences about the house which I can show you later. They were made by a man, or men, who looked for something, and that something was this gun. Now look at this closet! Do you see that pull-through? It was yanked out of the closet with the gun; but the man who took out the gun was not bent on using it, for he stopped long enough to push the pull-through back again. It didn't stay put, but it's obvious that it was pushed. See, like that!" He pushed the wire strand with his foot, and it sprang back again rebelliously.

"I also want you to look at those cartridges!" he said. "You see, it is the box which whoever used the gun tore open to load it with. I want you to notice that it contains only soft-nosed bullets. Not steel jackets, such as killed Lyfe. . . . Now come outside."

They followed him to the porch where he stopped beside the stick of wood he had put in the place of the rifle.

"That is where the rifle was found," he said. "Now I

want you to notice how the body lies. If it had fallen in the direction which it faces now, it would have been because Lyfe was shot in the chest while facing this spot. That is why the murderer, after committing the crime, loaded Lyfe's rifle with two charges and fired them, placing the rifle here as testimony that it was the weapon used for killing. But they did a clumsy job. Look here, doctor."

He strode to the place where the body lay in the dim light of the afterglow.

"Can't you see that the body has been moved? Here is the position into which it fell." As he spoke he moved the body with easy strength. "The bloodstains betray it, and the mark of his boots. See the scars in the grass where his toes spurned the ground? Could he have moved of his own strength after that first fall?"

The doctor shook his head gravely.

"He died instantly," he said.

"Now then," demanded Renfrew. "In this position; the position in which he really fell, from what direction would you say he was shot down?"

As he spoke he leaped to his full height, and stood alertly at the black man's side.

"From that direction," said the coroner. He pointed on a line which skirted the side of the house.

"Exactly!" said Renfrew. "Now all come over here a moment."

He led the way to a wagon track that ran from the barnyard out into the hills behind the house. At a place where this track dipped and curved inward toward the barn, he stopped short. He was immediately in line with the direction which the doctor had pointed out.

"Keep well out of the wagon track, and look at the ground," he said.

But he, himself, did not look down. He stood erect, and

he seemed to be intensely alert, poised as a wrestler is poised for the least movement of his antagonist. And he kept very close to the black man.

"There are the marks of wheels," he said. "And there is the only mud which I have seen for miles around. You will notice that the same mud was seen on that chair, inside. On either side of the wheel marks are the deep imprints of foot marks. Those are the tracks of the murderer, or murderers, for I counted two distinct impressions. We can measure them with the foot mark of any whom we arrest. The wheel marks, however, are what I want you to examine now. They are notable for a certain peculiarity. The right hind wheel of the vehicle that made them had a broken tire—"

"My God!" cried MacKeaver, and every man except Barto and Renfrew gazed with fixed eyes at the grocer, who stood like a man in a trance.

"Together with the fact that you stock the only steel-jacketed thirty-two bullets in Sagrinay, Mr. Murdock, and considering that you will not sell them to any casual buyer, I gather that the condition of your tire was not the only reason you could not use your buckboard."

"What do you mean?" squealed the grocer.

"I mean that your horse was spent!" snapped Renfrew. "You must have driven it almost to death over the back roads!"

"That's right!" cried MacKeaver. "It was spent!"

There was a little pause, and Renfrew turned silently to the black man.

"Anything you say may be used against you"—he began. But with a cry which was like the deep-voiced roar of a bull, Barto was upon him. He grasped Renfrew's pistol hand with his own great right, and with his left he drove home a blow which struck Renfrew's head with the impact

of a mallet. Renfrew crumpled to the earth without a sound.

MacKeaver threw himself on the giant, and the doctor backed him up, but Renfrew's error in underestimating Barto's strength was apparent in the ease with which the black giant threw the two older men to the ground, and, almost picking up the bulky grocer, made for the horses. They mounted as Lindley and MacKeaver gained their feet, and, taking Renfrew's mare in tow, they galloped away.

"Don't follow!" roared the black man, behind him. "There's death for whoever follows!" But MacKeaver was of ancient Scottish strain. He was not afraid of death. He plucked Renfrew's revolver from its holster and ran toward the buckboard. Barto turned in his saddle and fired. The judge's horse plunged in the traces and fell. MacKeaver, crying out, blazed away with the revolver, but they disappeared about the hill, laughing at him. When he rounded the hill on foot, they were too well obscured by the darkness to offer a fair mark for his poor aim. He returned in disgust to Lindley, who bent over Renfrew in silence.

When Renfrew regained consciousness, Lindley and a boy bent over him. The boy was Scotty, who had sat beside the couch where Renfrew lay ever since he had come back on his piebald pony, from the railway at Starnes, where they had stopped him.

"Easy does it," said the doctor. "That was a nasty crack."

"Where's Barto?" cried Renfrew, and tried to rise. The doctor held him down.

"They got away," he said. "Go easy."

"I'm a fool!" said Renfrew, bitterly. "I played the fool."

"Every man does, once," said the doctor.

"But not again," said Renfrew.

"Then you're better than most," said the doctor.

"We can't try to do better than that," Renfrew replied.

"Where did you come from?" he asked the boy.

"They held me up at Starnes," replied Scotty. "I got back while Lyfe was in the fields. This is an awful thing that's happened. I'm sorry for Lyfe."

Renfrew grinned.

"You're a fine old kid," he said, and shook the boy's hand.

"They thought I did it," said the boy seriously.

"I knew you didn't. That was the best clue I had."

The boy was silent, hanging his head thoughtfully.

"I wish I could live with you," he said. "Like Lyfe had me."

"You will," said Renfrew. "I'm determined on that. You can help me round 'em up."

From the foot of the cot MacKeaver stared down on him severely.

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Renfrew," he demanded, "that you built up your evidence against these men merely upon the assumption that the boy was innocent?"

"Well, no," said Renfrew. "I had a better advantage than that. You see, as I rode out here to see how Lyfe would greet the boy, I heard two shots. I was a good five miles from the place then, by the road, and I had to thank the clear air for the sound of them. Then, as I galloped into the last two miles, I heard another two shots. So when I saw that only two bullets had done the trick I knew that the two last shots were wasted. The evidence bore my knowledge out, that's all."

He looked at Scotty, and the boy was smiling at him.

"It's nice to see you smile," he said.

## CHAPTER V

### SCOTTY STANDS ALONE

WHEN Renfrew told the story of the murder of Desmond Lyfe, it was his custom to make it clear that his own part in the solution of the mystery had not been an heroic one.

"The detective of the story books," he was wont to remark, "does not often get punched in the head on his very first case. You see the dramatic method which I employed to reveal the criminal is all very well in stories, because in stories your hero has to be dramatic or he isn't heroic. When you try such theatricals in real life, you are making a grand-stand play, and when you make a grand-stand play you are fortunate if somebody hits you on the head, for then you won't do it again. If you do it again, you may get a bad habit of doing it all the time. Grand-stand plays are like rolling rocks down mountains. They make a grand noise which causes you to feel pretty good, but they're liable to destroy something more important than your own good feelings. I never tried it again."

As a matter of fact Renfrew's judgment of his behavior in the mystery of Lyfe's death, was more severe than the judgment which came from Regina. When headquarters received the report of the crime which Renfrew sent in, the powers that be were more than pleased. Whether their judgment was influenced by the comment which Judge MacKeaver added to Renfrew's report or not, it is hard to tell, but the grim old Scotchman was intensely impressed by the detective work with which Renfrew had discovered the mur-



derers, and his letter to the Commissioner still stands as the highest commendation which the work of an individual constable has ever won from the civic arm of the community. Regina was well pleased with Renfrew's achievement.

A murder had been committed, however, and the murderers were still at liberty. The Royal Mounted Police exist to make such a condition impossible in the commonwealth of Canada, and it did not seem probable that a single redcoat could deal with the situation unassisted; therefore headquarters sent to Sagrinay the most experienced man at the Commissioner's disposal, and that man was Staff Sergeant Deming.

Deming was Renfrew's superior in rank and senior in service, yet there was no suggestion of this as the two men discussed the crime and made their plans in the bare living room of the police post at Sagrinay.

"The boy's name is Scott McLeod," Renfrew informed Deming. "It was probably natural that every one should lay the murder to him, because Lyfe had constantly ill-treated him, and Scotty had been heard to threaten dire vengeance. But I knew the kid hadn't done it."

"But he ran away?"

"Yes, from Lyfe. It was coincidence that Barto, the black man, and Murdock, the grocer, committed the murder just after the boy had gone."

"Why did they kill him?"

"Murdock wanted Lyfe dead, because Lyfe had it in his power to ruin him at the month's end. Murdock was in debt to him. Mortgaged to the hilt."

"And the black fellow?"

"I don't know that. I had brought him in to question him about some threats he had made against Lyfe. The murder happened before I had a chance to do it. I wouldn't

be surprised if Murdock hired him to put Lyfe out of the way."

"You've back-tracked them all, I suppose?"

"Of course. Lyfe came from somewhere up in the Yukon. Worked in the gold fields up there. Seems to have a good record wherever I can trace him. But he hasn't a friend anywhere."

"Murdock?"

"Just a grocer, that's all. Grocer in Winnipeg, grocer in Moose Jaw, and lastly a grocer here. The man must have gone mad. I'd say he was a greedy man who continually lost money as he tried to hog it all. Then his mind gave way."

"Poor devil."

"Barto's the queerest one of the lot. He's got the face of an Indian and the color of a Hottentot. He's a giant for size. The only clue I've got to his past is from Nome, Alaska. He said he came from there, so I wired. They tell me he worked a dog team there, traded with Eskimos, was thoroughly distrusted, but never caught off base. That's all the information I've got about the lovely crew."

"Did Lyfe leave any papers?"

"Nothing to do with the crime. Swaths of notes and mortgages, that's all. I've cleaned the house out of all I could find. We'll go over the ground this afternoon. In the meantime I've got the alarm out over Canada and the States. If that black fellow gets away, it will be because the world's gone blind. I'm confident we'll hear from them soon, and when we do, that way lies our trail."

Scotty rode with them out to the scene of the murder. He had ridden at Renfrew's right hand ever since the death of Lyfe had set him free from the miserable existence which that harsh Irishman had imposed upon him. Renfrew had already started the legal formalities which were to make

him Scotty's guardian, and in the company of Renfrew the fair-haired youngster was like a different boy. He radiated a buoyant happiness, a zest for the adventure of living, such as he had never known, so that Deming, watching Scotty run his piebald pony off the road to skip about barriers and over obstacles which the pony seemed to enjoy as much as he, wondered that such a high-spirited, merry youngster could ever have been suspected of black murder.

"We've tried to cover the farm ever since the crime," explained Renfrew, as they approached Lyfe's lonely prairie house. "For there's always a chance of the criminal coming back to roost. It isn't likely with these fellows, though, because that black chap is a heap too wise. Still, Scotty and I haven't left it unguarded much, and now you've come, I suggest that one of us take up quarters here."

"Good idea," assented Deming. "It ought to be watched, anyway. Wouldn't do to have it looted. But it'll be a shame to keep you here. Any kid or night watchman could do the job."

"I'll do it," said Scotty.

Deming glanced at him with something of admiration, for the boy had spoken with an air of great self-confidence, so that the job referred to seemed a commonplace chore.

"Not full time," said Renfrew. "We'll do it together."

They had lunch at the farm after the two policemen had gone over the ground thoroughly, and again Deming found himself admiring Scotty's cool efficiency in such a matter as preparing a meal and clearing it away. His meriment and humor were contagious, so that they laughed at such things as would have depressed a man who liked his food from other sources than cans. The corned beef was not palatable, but Scotty didn't give them a chance to notice that. Deming wondered that any man could have found cause to beat a boy of Scotty's kind.

After lunch they left Scotty at the farm with Renfrew's promise to rejoin him immediately after reporting at the post, and Scotty's promise not to bite off more than he could chew if any trouble arose. But Deming had to come out and give the boy Renfrew's regrets, because when the two redcoats arrived at the post a telegram was awaiting them from Kamloops, British Columbia.

"Am holding man answering description of Murdock wanted for Sagrinay murder. Please send and get him," read the message, and it was signed by the sheriff of Kamloops.

"That's promising," grinned Deming. "Looks like the end of the trail."

"Or the beginning of it," said Renfrew. "You go out and tell Scotty I can't get back to him. I'll take the evening train from Starnes and make Kamloops by morning."

Deming nodded.

"I'll get out there for supper," he said. "He's a nice kid."

"I wish you could go right away," said Renfrew seriously. "He's expecting me back, and I don't like to let him down."

"Right away it is," grinned Deming. "That kid's fallen into good luck, when he swapped Lyfe for you."

Leaving word to have telegrams sent out to him, Deming rode out to the farm as soon as he had seen Renfrew off on his mission, and stayed with Scotty until morning. When he arrived at Sagrinay the following day, he found in the letter box a note which had been hurriedly scrawled in pencil.

"Am scribbling this at the station," read the note. "Better be at Starnes to-morrow evening. May need your assistance bringing prisoners in. Renfrew."

Deming gazed at it in perplexity. It was not like Renfrew, he reflected, to ask for help in such a simple matter as de-

## *SCOTTY STANDS ALONE*

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livering a prisoner. That note suggested that Renfrew had run upon something which made Deming's presence at Starnes imperative. Finding no clue in a repeated reading of the note, Deming decided to ride to Starnes and find out what that something was.

In this manner Scotty found himself alone at the farm where Lyfe had been murdered.

## CHAPTER VI

### NIGHT IN A HAUNTED HOUSE

**A**RIDER came in from Worden's ranch, five miles away bearing the message which Deming had telephoned to that point; his message that he must leave Scotty alone. Scotty stood on the top of the hill which screened Lyfe's ranch house from the road, and watched the messenger departing until he was out of sight. Then Scotty returned to the house with an indescribable feeling of importance. For a day and a night he was the sole representative of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police at the scene of an important murder. His first thought was to see that his gun was loaded.

The gun was a forty-five caliber Colt revolver. It had been given him by Renfrew with careful instructions for using it. These consisted principally of the simple advice to "always have it ready for use, but use it only when absolutely necessary." Having loaded it, Scotty felt that he could not employ his time better than in perfecting his ability to use it; for having it ready must certainly mean a good aim and steady hand.

He found that the process of learning how to use the great revolver was so fascinating, and so full of possibilities in the way of various targets and diverse positions, that any one who had come within three miles of the Lyfe ranch that tranquil afternoon, might have been forgiven for believing that a pitched battle was in progress there. In the excitement of being a frontier scout holding off surrounding red-skin hordes which were represented by tin cans placed



strategically to test his markmanship, Scotty so far forgot the primary reason for which the gun had been given him that he fired off all but two rounds of the ammunition he had for it.

It is difficult to blame him for this, because it is difficult to realize the possibility of having to use a forty-five caliber revolver for any other use save that of target shooting. While Scotty derived an undeniable thrill of adventure from the possession of that weapon, he did not really entertain for a moment the thought that he might have to use it. Since Lyfe had died, he had known what happiness meant; and a happy boy, in the midst of the quiet, colorful prairie lands of western Canada, naturally relegates the realities of shooting men to death to the land of dreams and high imaginations.

Scotty, even when finding to his dismay that his pocketful of cartridges had suddenly become two lonely rounds, did not worry because he felt himself disarmed in the face of danger; he was rather dismayed because he felt very foolish. It was a fine thing for the sole representative of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police at the scene of an important murder to go shooting off all the police ammunition at tin cans and imaginary bandits! He disliked to think what Renfrew would have to say about it. Then he cleaned the revolver, slipped in his two rounds of ammunition, made sure that they were in a position to come next to the firing chamber, and put the revolver at the head of his cot in the bedroom upstairs.

By the time he had done this, the sun was low, and a bar of flaming color across the western sky showed that night was not far off. So Scotty made himself some porridge and opened a can of fruit: that was his supper.

As he watched the pot of cereal bubbling over the open fire he gradually became conscious of his complete lone-

liness. The room in which he sat was becoming dim, as the twilight deepened, and the fire flickered strangely about the black body of the pot. . . . Scotty remembered what the room had been like when Lyfe had shared this farm house with him. Lyfe had always sat in the big chair by the table while Scotty had cooked the meals in the kitchen beyond. . . . And now Lyfe was dead. . . . At that point in his reflection, Scotty discovered to his dismay that he didn't want to turn and look at that chair. He was seized with an unreasonable fear that he might see Lyfe sitting there waiting for his dinner.

The porridge seethed in the pot, and Scotty awakened abruptly to the need of the moment. He whisked the pot off the fire and set it down on the hearthstone. Then, encouraged by his movement, he turned to the big chair at the table. It stood there, gaunt and significantly vacant. Scotty laughed at himself rather nervously. Then he hurried abruptly from the room without any idea of why he did so. It was not until he emerged from the house and stood on the porch outside that he formulated in his mind the reassuring excuse that it would be some time before the cereal was cool enough for him to eat it.

The sun had totally disappeared now, and the farm yard was bathed in that soft afterglow which protracts the prairie twilight. Already the pale light of early stars could be seen high in the spaces above the lonely farm, and night seemed to be lurking, like a dangerous foe in ambush, ready to swoop down and kill the light of day. Altogether an air of unpleasant suspense overhung the farm yard and the whole, empty house. Scotty had the feeling that something was going to happen.

Then he found himself gazing intently at the spot where Lyfe's body had been found. Renfrew had shown it to him. The spot where Lyfe had lain dead—that great, strong,

brutal man— Scotty could not move his eyes immediately from that place. Lyfe had been so active; like a bear, or wolf, he had been; dangerous and brutal, but splendidly strong, and vigorous. Scotty remembered how Lyfe had tried to beat him with the whip. If that black man hadn't come . . .

It was at that point Scotty's eyes left the fatal dark spot in the grass. The black man had come out of the barn, and it was to the barn that Scotty looked now. It stood, tremendous and desolate, across the yard. Its great doorway was open wide, and it showed like the black entrance to a cave, suggesting a hiding place for innumerable terrors.

Very suddenly Scotty felt a horrible feeling of despair creep over his whole body. It was as though some poisonous substance had been injected into his blood stream to course through all his veins and turn his blood to water. He felt keenly his loneliness—and yet it was something worse than loneliness.

It was as though all the black passions, and murderous intentions which had led up to the terrible death of Desmond Lyfe, were there, in that loneliness with him; surrounding him, threatening to descend upon him with the coming of the night, filling all that vacant house and grounds with the presence of evil.

Scotty abruptly knew the need for firelight. He tore his eyes away from the black cavern of the barn door, and throwing open the door of the house as though he expected to find it held against him, he hurried into the living room. His heart fell as he realized that, even here, he was alone, and that he was to be alone all night in this vacant house with the memories which haunted it.

With that realization, however, came also the realization that he must make the best of a bad job. There was no

use being scared until something occurred to be scared of. If the sense that something was going to happen occupied his mind all night, he would feel pretty foolish by morning if nothing *did* happen; and if something was really going to happen, there was no need to be scared of it until it came. Scotty was wise enough to know that the worst of all things is fear, so he did his best to put fear out of his mind, and eat his supper in peace. Before he started to eat, however, he ran upstairs and got the big revolver; then he stuck it in his trousers pocket and hurried back to the fire again. It was while he was eating supper that he decided to sit up all night.

That was because the thought of moving away from the friendly light of the fire and retiring to the isolation of a bedroom was not endurable. There were books in this big living room, and although Scotty had read them through and through, he felt that the oft read stories would be the best retreat he could find from the singular sense of foreboding which pervaded his mind. So he chose a book about cow-boys and Indians and tried to read it.

He had hardly read the first three pages before it occurred to him that he must keep the fire up. He arose from his chair and threw one of the many logs which were piled beside the hearth onto the flickering flames. This caused the fire to leap up suddenly, and Scotty caught with the tail of his eye, the reflection of that sudden flame upon one of the blind, black windows. The sudden start with which he turned to examine this phenomenon, emphasized the fact that until now he had been reluctant to look away from the fire into the gloomy vacancy of the big room.

The flames showed it to him vividly. The unused table, the vacant chair where Lyfe had always sat; the lamp, unlit, and seeming like a dead thing on the table. And there was

the flaming reflection of the fire on the panes of either window. Beyond those window panes was the blackness of the night. The empty barnyard where the dead body of Lyfe had lain; the black cavern of the barn where the black man had hidden. . . .

It occurred to Scotty then, that if there should be anybody out in that barnyard; if there should be anybody lurking in that barn, the firelight in the windows would betray the fact that he sat here by the fire. Scotty was crouching on the floor as he thought these things, and, staring at the windows, he could not arise from that position. He crouched there and reflected that even now some presence might be peering in through the glass, staring at him, preparing to enter.

Then it came home to him that his best place was upstairs. If he was to keep watch in this empty house, it would be foolish to do so here, where a door suddenly opened could admit any intruder and take him completely by surprise. The thing to do was to place a chair before every door through which the house could be entered, and upset a chair beneath each window. Then he could retire to a bedroom and keep watch, secure in the knowledge that no one could enter the house without betraying his entrance by stumbling over one of those chairs.

He did this, but before he ascended the stairway, he thought of the fire. It must be put out, and the ashes must be dead, for no one must suspect his presence in the house. With his heart bounding in his breast, he poured water on the fire, and was appalled by the black darkness which enshrouded him as the ashes died. That darkness was emphasized rather than relieved by the twin squares of gray light which were framed by the two windows. Scotty, the fire dead, hurried away from that room, for the dim light which



the windows admitted, picked out with ghostly magic many curious shapes which were the familiar furniture of the room.

As he went up to the bedroom, Scotty tried to convince himself that he was foolish; that there was no need for these precautions, and that he was frightening himself with unmanly panic. But he could not get rid of the presentiment that something was held in suspense at that lonely house; that something was going to happen. In the bedroom at the head of the stairs he did not dare light a lamp, because he was too conscious of the black spaces which surrounded the house; he could too clearly imagine the presence of some one out in that darkness, trying eagerly to peer in. And when he threw himself, fully clothed, and with the gun in his pocket, on the bed, he was terribly aware of the empty rooms below him.

He remembered vividly how Lyfe had moved about those rooms when he had been alive. How the big, black-bearded man had raged from kitchen to living room, in the fury of his many fits of anger. He pictured Lyfe on that last, fatal day, when he had been killed. He had probably seen the black man and slammed forth from the living room or kitchen, or perhaps from that black barn, raging against his gigantic enemy. And then the black man had shot him. . . . Scotty pictured with painful fascination how the big, familiar body must have pitched forward as the shots crashed home, plunging to the ground, inert and lifeless. . . .

He wished he had not thought of that. . . . Supposing there were really such things as ghosts! Supposing Lyfe might even now, be there, in the blackness of the room downstairs. . . .

Scotty was never able to tell how long he lay there, with his eyes fixed on the darkness which filled his room, trying to get that thought out of his mind. But he could not do it.



## *NIGHT IN A HAUNTED HOUSE*

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It flamed in his imagination like a fire which threw a ghostly, flickering light over the fears which infested his soul. And while he was still a victim of those fears he became suddenly rigid as a sound penetrated the terrible silence of the house. Some one was moving in the room below!

## CHAPTER VII

### BARTO COMES BACK

**F**OR a moment Scotty lay, rigid with horror. That sound must be Lyfe, come back to haunt his vacant house!

Then Scotty remembered that he was doing duty for Renfrew. And Renfrew did not deal with ghosts. There followed long moments of listening. Scotty strained the nerves of his hearing, as a strong man strains every muscle and tendon lifting a heavy weight. Tensely the boy awaited the repetition of that sound, but the silence was so real, so unbroken, that the shrill noises of the prairie insects which sounded from outside, penetrated Scotty's ears with a din he had never known before. He felt that even if that sound occurred again from the room downstairs, it would be drowned by the insect noises. But it was not. Just as Scotty was successfully convincing himself that he had been deceived by some creaking board of the wooden house, a loud crash from below betrayed the fact that some one was really in the house with him.

At that Scotty sat up, moving with great caution, so that he would make no sound to betray himself. He felt immeasurably small, and helpless, as he sat there and listened to the noises which the intruder now made with no effort at concealment.

Then, through the dismay which made Scotty more frightened than he had ever been in his life before, there filtered the encouraging fact that the intruder obviously believed that the house was empty. Whoever moved about down-

stairs, did not know Scotty was there! He could still make his way out to the open! He could still escape!

And then he felt the gun in the pocket at his side, and he remembered that to escape was not his job. He was here to represent the Mounted Police. He was here in Renfrew's place. He must act as Renfrew would act; and that was not to run away.

With that thought moving him, and vastly filling him with courage, Scotty gritted his teeth tightly together, silently slipped off his shoes, and with a wildly beating heart began to feel his way out of the room. As he softly crept toward the stairs with the gun clutched in one hand and the other groping before him, Scotty was aware of the danger of his position. Whoever the man below might be, it was probable he was engaged in an evil business. Therefore, he must be taken by surprise. And Scotty realized with a thrill of uneasiness that the success of his adventure, even his life itself, depended upon his making no mistake. When the moment came, he would not be able to afford a single, smallest slip. . . . In the darkness of the hallway, Scotty was seized by despair. What could he do, a boy, against Lyfe's murderers?

The answer occurred immediately. He could run away. Slip out of the house before his presence was discovered. Then he felt the revolver again. . . . He would see it through.

He made his way downstairs without the creak of a board, or any other sound; and he passed down the passage until he found himself in a doorway, peering into the living room. This room was now dimly illumined by the table lamp, and the smoky yellow flare showed Scotty immediately that every corner of the room had been ransacked. Over the mantel shelf a plank had been ripped away, and standing before this place, with one arm rummaging inside the opening, stood

a great and towering figure. On the table where the lamp glowed was a disordered heap of papers.

Scotty took all this in with one glance, and the first thought which it aroused in him was one of fear. The man who stood at the mantel was terribly tall and bulky. He towered in the room, making the whole dim space seem contracted, and even the furniture seemed in comparison with his huge bulk to be made for a doll's house. An impulse suddenly seized hold of the boy, an impulse to run; to run and run, anywhere, anyway. To run until he fell exhausted; away from this haunted house; away from this fiendish form. And the impulse was so gripping, and so imperative, that it aroused in Scotty all the fighting spirit he possessed. Panic was clutching at his heart, and he would not yield. He would not! Then the gigantic man at the mantelpiece turned around. It was the black man.

## CHAPTER VIII

### HUNTED DOWN!

SCOTTY saw Barto's gaunt, long face, as the lamplight glowed upon it. The black color of it painted the bony features like a sinister mask, and the yellow flare of the lamp, catching the man's eyes, gave him a fiendish and unearthly ferocity. Scotty caught his breath with a pang of fear as the man turned, but Barto did not see him. He walked to the table and bent over the papers there with his brow furrowed, seeming like a gigantic ape with the face of an American Indian. Scotty stood, paralyzed in the doorway and stared at him.

Suddenly the black man stood erect and turned directly toward the boy. He must have sensed Scotty's presence, because there was that manner in his turning. Scotty, controlling himself with a violent effort, pulled up his gun, as the black man turned to him.

"I'll shoot you if you move!" he cried; and he was startled by the discovery that he was screaming at the top of his voice.

The black man did not seem to be disconcerted at the sight of the gun. He ignored it, and stood staring at Scotty with a peculiar expression in his eyes. And Scotty went cold with horror, for the black giant was looking at him with the fond, satisfied look with which a tiger regards its prey; with which a thief might greedily eye a mass of shining gold. Scotty sensed with horror the extraordinary fact that the black man had come to this house for something Lyfe had left behind, and that that something was *himself*!

The black man, greed still in his eyes, moved toward him. "Stand back!" cried Scotty. "I'll shoot you! I swear it!"

And then, as the giant approached him, Scotty knew, with a hideous feeling of sheer sickness, that he could not shoot. He could not pull the trigger. Bereft of his only strength, he glanced about him wildly, saw the chair which he had placed in the doorway, and threw it full force at the black man. Barto fended it off with one great arm, and it hit the lamp. The room was plunged into darkness, and as the lamp crashed to the floor, Scotty ran madly for the stairs. The last thing he saw as the lamp went down was the black man, striding confidently toward him.

It seemed to Scotty that he hardly touched the stairs as he fled to the upper floor, and once there, he dashed down the passageway, flung himself into the first room he saw and slammed the door. There was a key in the lock and he locked it without thinking, almost automatically. Then, as he heard the black man, coming slowly, deliberately, up the stairs, he gazed madly about the room for some means of barricading that flimsy door.

Directly beside the door was a huge clothespress; a vast piece of mahogany furniture which stood six feet high and was all of three feet deep. Scotty found a space between this clothespress and the wall at the side of the room. He leaped into this space and shoved at the huge clothespress with all his might. He could not budge it.

Outside he heard the black man slamming the doors of room after room, seeking the one where Scotty was hiding; and he hunted without haste; with a terrible deliberation which spoke of the confidence he had in his own power, in Scotty's helplessness. Stifling a sob in his throat, Scotty exerted all his strength against the clothespress. Bracing himself against the wall, breathing tremulously, deep, gasp-



ing breaths, the boy pushed with hands and feet. Still the clothespress did not budge. And Barto was rattling at the handle of the door.

Scotty cried out with a gasp that was half a scream, and fairly scrambled up the clothespress with his hands and feet on its side and his back pressed almost to breaking against the wall. Thus he exerted a greater leverage, and as the black man outside threw his shoulder with a crash against the door, the clothespress moved, tilted under the pressure Scotty madly strained to exert. Providentially the door failed to give under the black man's first attack, and before he could repeat it the clothespress fell. Thrown off its base by Scotty, who shoved at it from near the ceiling, it tottered and fell to its side with a mighty crash which Scotty hardly heard as he tumbled painfully to the floor.

The black man was battering at the door now with heavy blows, and Scotty laughed excitedly as he saw that the clothespress, on its side across the doorway, reinforced the lock so that the giant battered in vain. Then Scotty ran to the window, sure of his escape. He ran to the window while the house shook with the black man's blows, and found that he had chosen the wrong room. For the house was built on a hill, and this side of it was high above the ground. Below the window where Scotty stood was a sheer drop of forty feet to a mass of farming machinery which stood below.

Then the sickening fear came back to Scotty's heart, and he wrung his hands as he sought desperately for some way out. It was not until he overcame the fear that he found it. Stripping the bed of coverlet, blankets and sheets, he clenched his teeth grimly and began knotting them together. While he strove with all his strength to make his life line strong, the black man smashed away at the door.

Scotty had knotted two blankets together, and was grimly

undoing a sheet which he had tied badly to the blanket, when Barto's fist came crashing through the panel. The black man swore with pain as he accomplished this feat, and Scotty, glancing up, saw in the dim light the great black hand with blood glistening upon it, protruding through the broken wood. Then it was withdrawn. Scotty sat for a moment, rigid and unmoving at this startling exhibition of the black man's power. Then he returned to his task with desperate fingers. And as he worked the black man proceeded to tear out the wood from the doorway with the strength and ferocity of a grizzly bear.

In the darkness of a gray night, the boy and the black man raced. Scotty, who had no doubt that the black man would tear him to pieces if he caught him, struggled with his deft fingers to escape. The black man strove like a maddened beast to hunt the youngster out.

As Scotty had tied the last sheet to the coverlet he leaped from the bed to pull it to the window, and he saw the great arm of the giant reach in through the gap he had torn in the wood, groping for the key. Wildly he dashed forward and whisked the key from the lock, and with horror he felt the black hand grip his arm. He snatched it away in time, and, catching a glimpse of burning eyes which gleamed at him through the sundered woodwork, he darted to the window once again, and hastily making his life line fast to the bed, flung it out. It fell woefully short.

Scotty turned back to the room once more. It was in his mind to seek some possible means of lengthening his rope, but as he turned back he saw the head and shoulder of the black man, inside the door. He saw at once that in another moment his enemy would be within the room, and the sight of the grinning head, the immense arm and shoulder, was like a glimpse of death. Remembering the death of Lyfe, Scotty stood there, and was moved to desperation. Without

a word or any sound, he whipped out the big revolver and fired.

There was a great explosion, and a haze of smoke which filled his nostrils and eyes with its sharp tang. The black man cried out with a voice which was a roar. He cried out in a roar of pain, and then cursed at the boy from the other side of the door.

"You will pay me for that! Rat boy!" he boomed.

And Scotty, tearing the mattress from the bed, carried it to the window where he dropped it carefully upon the machinery below. He saw with glee that it fell in a manner which formed a sort of cradle below him, and with the sound of rending wood in his ears, and the horrible consciousness of the black man close behind him, he slid out of the window and began to work his way down the rope. In the second before he dropped his head below the window sill, he saw the great body of the black man pull itself through the ripped door like some monstrous form emerging from a cave.

He was dismayed to find that he could not slip quickly down that line of bedclothes. It swung with his weight, and was horribly slippery in his hands. He had to twist it about his legs, and pause too often to gain a hold with his fingers. The folds of it seemed to fight him. He was not half way down when he felt a tug at the upper end of his line and felt himself being swiftly pulled up as though he were no more than a cork on a string.

"You are a fish, rat boy!" boomed the black man, above him. "And I've got you, now."

Frantic, Scotty clung with one hand to the line and reached for his gun with the other. He had half pulled it from his pocket, when the hand which clung to the line violently hit the window sill. He clutched desperately then with both hands, and heard the gun fall clattering among the farm ma-

chinery below him. Then a mighty hand was at his throat, and he found himself thrown into the room as though he had been a fish flung from the water by a cat.

He scrambled to his feet and made instantly for the door. The black man cursed behind him, and out of the tail of his eye, Scotty saw the giant pick up a chair and hurl it toward him. He threw himself to the floor and the chair hurtled over his head. Then he scrambled blindly for the door again, but he found that the giant had hurled the chair so forcibly that its legs had pierced the broken panels of the door and it stood firmly wedged in the opening. His escape was cut off.

He turned then, expecting with cold horror to see the black man pounce upon him, but he did not. He stood there, a gigantic, ape-like figure, silhouetted against the gray pallor of the window; sure of his strength; sure of his victim's helplessness. Scotty imagined that he grinned. It was as though he were locked in a cage with a gorilla or a bear. And he could not endure it.

"You haven't got me yet!" he cried passionately, and ran about the walls of the room, seeking for some way out.

"But now!" roared the giant suddenly, and pounced forward.

With a cry Scotty plunged under the bed, and the black man dived for him like a great animal; turned the bed over as a bear might turn over an ant hill, and yanked the boy out by one leg. Scotty struggled then. He fought with all the strength of his wiry body. He twisted his arms and legs in the grasp of the giant until he felt his tendons crack, and hot pains shoot through his limbs. It seemed as though the skin were torn off where the black man's great paws held the twisting limbs in his vise-like grip, and while Scotty did not hesitate to bite and tear at his captor's body, he received many scratches and abrasions in return. He fought

## *HUNTED DOWN!*

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and struggled until everything turned black, and the grasp of his enemy, tightening, squeezed the breath and consciousness from his body. In the grasp of the black man Scotty fainted, and the giant laughed aloud. His laugh was a cruel, hard sound, and as he held the boy's body in his arms, it sounded like the growl of a satisfied beast.

## CHAPTER IX

### WHY SCOTTY RAN AWAY

WITH the limp form of the boy under one arm, Barto slung the clothespress from in front of the door with one mighty heave. He then grasped the handle of the door and tore it from its lock. He took the boy in both arms, then, carrying the body as a bear might carry a lamb, and strode to the top of the stairs. He had placed one foot on the first step down, when a blinding light flashed up from below and a hard clear voice rang in his ear.

"Stick up your hands, Barto! You're covered!"

The black man acted instantly and amazingly.

"Shoot, and you kill the boy!" he cried. And he plunged down the stairs into the blinding light, bearing the boy across his body.

Renfrew, below, with the flashlight in one hand and his pistol in the other, acted just as quickly. He had come to the bottom of the stairs just as Barto tore the door from its lock, and he had cannily awaited the moment for the black man to reach the bottom. But when he saw the huge form at the top of the stairs with the boy clutched in its grasp, he had lost his head, and snapped out his command and threat. As the black man responded with his downward plunge, Renfrew immediately resumed his original purpose, and dodged aside. When Barto reached the bottom Renfrew was in this manner placed beside and behind him. He dropped his flash, grasped the giant about the



throat with one crooked elbow, and jammed the muzzle of his revolver into the black man's side.

"Now, drop him!" he grunted. "Or I'll blow you open!"

With a roar of anger the giant dropped the boy like a sack to the floor and tore at Renfrew's grip with a magnificent courage. Renfrew was not a small man, nor a light man, nor a weak man, and he had been prepared for resistance, yet the heaving body of the murderer flung him away as though he had been a dog at the tail of a bull, and his pistol went off in the air. Letting the gun hang by its lanyard, Renfrew dived for Barto's legs and brought him down with a low tackle, artfully twisted to increase the big man's fall. Barto closed with him, and Renfrew locked the man's throat between his legs in a scissors grip. Madly the giant twisted to tear at his assailant with his huge hands, and Renfrew, tightening the scissors, was flung about, battering chairs and walls and floor, as he twisted to avoid them. He felt the lanyard snap and knew that his gun was gone, so he drew himself up and closed the giant's head in a lock which twisted it grotesquely against the pressure of the redcoat's legs.

While Barto thrashed about violently in that double grip, Scotty came to his senses, and for a moment crazily staggered in circles about the hall. In this manner he ran into Deming, who, posted outside the house, had heard the shot and come running. He now groped with drawn pistol to make head or tail out of the thrashing, wriggling mass of limbs which was the fighting men.

"He's killing him! He's killing him!" cried Scotty excitedly and then, incontinently, he ran away; ran out of the house.

Deming discovered which of the struggling men was Renfrew and which was Barto when Barto, gaining his knees, resisting the pressure of the redcoat's hold, dashed Renfrew

from him with a violence which sent the policeman hurtling through the air until he struck Deming, smashing him against the wall. Both policemen fell to the floor, and Barto dashed like a mad bull for the doorway.

Renfrew, weaponless but undefeated, scrambled to his feet, leaving Deming, stunned, behind him, and took after the black man like a shot. Plunging through the doorway in his stride, he saw the huge figure making swiftly for the barn. Sprinting with all the speed he had, containing himself eagerly for the tackle, he gained upon him. Then Barto went down; but it was not Renfrew who brought him low, for Scotty had run away with a purpose. He knew where a gun was, and he knew that it contained a useful cartridge. With his head singing dizzily, and his knees weak beneath him, he had run to the mattress underneath the window. Picking up the gun, he was in time to see that race for the barn, and he fired low at the speeding form of the black man.

Barto went down with the roar of a wounded bull. He arose crazily as Renfrew sped down upon him, rolled over again, and arose to one knee to meet the redcoat's attack. Renfrew, at full speed, tackled him about the neck. The two rolled over and over. The black man tore at Renfrew's throat, his chest, his limbs. He tore Renfrew's clothes from him, he ripped the skin with his great paws. Seeming unable to regain his feet, he twisted his body from the waist and smashed at his enemy with gigantic arms. Again and again he flung the redcoat from him, and again and again Renfrew came back. Beaten, bruised, all but unconscious, gasping for breath, Renfrew was determined that the murderer should not escape him again. Yet Barto was dragging Renfrew and Scotty, who beat at him with the butt of his revolver, toward the barn, when Deming came out and pressed his gun beneath the black man's ear.

At that Barto ceased abruptly to struggle. He collapsed limply, half sitting, upon the ground.

"All right," he boomed breathlessly. "You have me. I am shot through one thigh. I can't fight you now."

"That was a magnificent war," gasped Renfrew.

"How did you come here?" demanded the black man. And he cried out the question with a peculiar quality of despair.

Renfrew did not immediately reply, for he was spent.

"We'll go back to the house," he said.

At the house, Renfrew first examined Scotty, and finding the boy injured no more seriously than a few bruises and abrasions, he attended the black man's wounds. There was a scratch in the shoulder which Scotty had inflicted with that shot through the door, and a clean drilled hole through one thigh, which was easily bandaged, but none the less painful.

"You haven't told me how you came here to interfere," growled Barto, who had sat silent throughout these ministrations. "I thought I had called you both away."

Renfrew grinned.

"I suspected that the messages came from you. Who is your friend at Kamloops?"

"Find out," said the black man.

"When I found that the sheriff at Kamloops had sent no such message," said Renfrew, "your telegram served only to give you away. I knew at once that you had decoyed me there because you wanted the coast clear at Sagrinay. I suppose you didn't know then that Deming had come here, and so you had to put off your visit until to-night. That's why you sent him the message which brought him to Starnes. If we had ridden without haste from Starnes to Sagrinay, you would have still had time to get what you came here for, but I remembered that you had said Lyfe had some-

thing you wanted, so I was willing to bet we could find you here. We hired a motor at Starnes and ran out in jig time." All this Renfrew said with calm seriousness. His voice changed to something hard and cold when he followed his explanation up with a simple question.

"Why did you attack the boy?" he demanded.

Barto gazed at him in somber silence for a moment.

"You are right," he said at last. "Lyfe had something I wanted. I came here and examined his papers. They were concealed behind that board in the mantelpiece." He pointed out the place. "I read them and discovered that what I wanted was the boy." He turned his gaze upon Scotty, and Scotty, seeing once more the greed for possession in his eyes, shivered, remembering things.

"That was a hopeless thing," said the black man simply. "It is a foolish, futile thing for a man to try and steal a boy."

"I ought to tell you," said Renfrew suddenly, "that anything you say will be used as evidence against you."

The giant turned upon him with somber dignity.

"Those are the foolish tricks of a white man," he said. "They are derived from fear. You will keep me and hang me, or I shall get away once more and laugh at you. Nothing I can say will make any difference. So I am going to tell you everything I know."

"That will be a confession," said Renfrew. "A confession of guilt."

"Not a confession," said the black man. "It will be a revelation. A revelation of guilt. And the guilt is Lyfe's, not mine."

"I think we will drive to Sagrinay," said Deming, briefly. "You can make your revelations there."

And in coldest midnight, they drove to Sagrinay.

## CHAPTER X

### THE BLACK MAN

THE story of the black man was made up of many contributions. There was the many paged report which came from Nome, Alaska, and there were the various documents concerning the origin and the position in life of the boy, Scott McLeod. All these things came afterward; were collected laboriously, with infinite patience by the police. Yet they were all a part of the black man's story, as he told it that night, by lamplight at the police post in Sagrinay.

Barto was a black man, and he looked like an Indian. This was because his father was a full-blooded Aztec, and his mother was a full-blooded West Indian negro. The mixed blood gave him an aspect of resolute but sinister strength of body and intention. Also, he derived from remote forebears a remarkable dignity, so that as he sat in the police post that night at Sagrinay, a confessed murderer, and claimed from both sides of his ancestry the blood of kings, his words carried the sound of truth. Renfrew respected them.

"And they were kings of civilized peoples," the black man had said. "When you white men were barbarians, living in reed huts, they dwelt in palaces, surrounded by men of learning. I, too, am a man of learning."

And he was. Renfrew and Deming sat there in the bare guard room at Sagrinay with the gigantic figure of Barto making them seem small and fragile in their gay scarlet tunics, and they knew that the deep-voiced giant was a man



of learning. Yet that learning, like everything else about the black man, was fantastic, unfinished; rude with the rudeness of rough, hand-hewn things.

Barto had gone to college, and had studied with a mind eager to learn—but something had held him back.

"It's hard to explain," said Renfrew, afterward. "But it's something like this: Supposing you desire to travel from here to the city. You can follow the open road and see not only the road itself, but everything beside the road and beyond it. Everything that makes up and has built up the road. Or you can take the tunnel. It will get you there just the same, but you won't see anything or hear anything but what is in your train.

"It was like that with Barto. He learned all right, but his peculiar mind, with its obsession of kingship, sent him into a tunnel which he followed all through college. And he learned only what was on his train of thought."

And Barto's train of thought was this: that the white man owed his rise from the reed hut to a civilization which exalted him above the ancient civilizations of African and Aztec to his knowledge of the metals. All through his studies of history, literature and chemistry, Barto twisted everything he learned into that subterranean channel. Because the white man had learned to conquer the secrets and the uses of metal, and to subjugate every other element of life to it, the white man had conquered the earth. And because that is what Barto set out to learn, that is all his learning brought him. He left the college at Mexico City with a colossal jumble of facts which he had twisted into proofs of his own ingenious theory. Then he went to work.

He went to work as a sailor, because that would take him out into the world. His father's means had stopped short of helping after college, and he must make his own way. It was a hard way, for he found that the barbarous white men



with whom he came in contact had no use for the blood of ancient African kings, save to make it work for them. So he brooded over the matter of metals, and made his way from one mining community to another, intent on wresting the white man's secret from him. He thought he had it when he discovered that the most powerful of the metals was gold. But he soon found that this was merely the first part of the secret. The other part consisted of getting that gold into one's own possession.

You can picture him sitting there in the dim lamplight of the Mounted Police Post at Sagrinay: explaining it in the middle of the night to Renfrew and Deming. He explained it very seriously, very deliberately and earnestly. To him it was a reasonable and logical explanation of nothing less than murder.

Barto was a most remarkable criminal, because in his own dark, straightforward mind, he was not a murderer at all. He was a sinister and irresistible force, moving relentlessly toward a goal which had been conceived in heaven knows what remote jungle conflicts, and his movements were dictated by cold reason.

He must have gold. Surely Renfrew could see that? could appreciate that? And Deming. Deming was a red-coat, a white man, who was the creature of the white man's law. Couldn't he understand how necessary it was for Barto to have that gold?

Renfrew made no answer to that, he merely sat at the table puffing his pipe, watching with thoughtful eyes every shade of expression on the black man's face—and Renfrew kept his hand on the holster of his gun.

"What did you do then?" demanded Deming.

"I went to Nome!" said the black man.

He went to Nome, in Alaska, because in those days every man greedy for gold was on his way to Nome. You can

picture him there in that grand, rock-littered country of majestic distances; a dark and sinister figure, gigantic, in a teeming mob of gold-hungry adventurers. He was welcome there because of his strength, which was equal to that of two or three ordinary men. There were arduous trails to follow, and heavy burdens to transport over those trails. Where other men struggled against the roughest barriers of un pity-ing nature, and many died from exhaustion on the trail, black Barto came through with his burdens with a magnificent and invaluable ease. So he carried the burdens of many men, and was richly paid for it. He carried the burdens of Ralph McLeod.

McLeod was one of the fortunate ones. He was among the first of the gold rush to find his gold, and he staked out a claim where the yellow metal was rich in the gravel; a fortune at the feet of the worker; a visible temptation, a garden of gold. And to this garden McLeod brought Barto to be his laborer and burden bearer—Barto who must have gold to win the kingship which was in his blood.

And Barto came, bearing a great load of provisions and supplies to the lonely, frightened miner. Yes, McLeod was frightened. He had found a rich claim, he had found this garden of gold, and he was frightened, because he knew that Alaska was crowded with men who had staked their lives and fortunes upon finding such riches as his gravel flaunted to the eyes of every passer-by. And he knew that not three in ten of those adventurers would hesitate to rob him if they could get away with it. So the poor fellow, seeing in the mighty stature of the black man a valuable guard against aggression, engaged, to protect his gold, Barto, who, later, was to use his need for that metal as a logical excuse for murder.

That was a terribly ironic thing, if you know what irony means: if you don't, you should look it up in the dictionary,

for poor McLeod's mistake is a remarkable instance of the meaning of that word. And it was pitiful, too, for among innumerable men who came to the North in greed and for adventure, McLeod was one of the few who had come for a purpose unselfish, even if it was a foolish purpose and a vain one. McLeod had a son. And that is all he had. In the lonely evenings which he and Barto spent in the shack which McLeod had built upon his claim, he used to tell the black man about that boy. It was all McLeod lived for, he used to say; for the boy's sake he had joined the gold rush, and for the boy's sake he lived here in squalor and bitter hardship, working his claim and storing his gold in little leather bags. When he had panned the gravel of its last crumb of the yellow metal, he would go back to the boy, and it would give that little fellow a chance his father had never had.

"I want he should be a gentleman," McLeod would say. "Not like me, just a farmer, and a roustabout. He's going to be a gentleman, and go through the colleges with the best of them. When I go back to him I'll be a rich man, and then he can have anything he likes."

Poor McLeod quite overlooked the fact that among the things the boy might have liked was the presence of a father: that an honest farmer could have been a better father for the boy than a wandering gold miner. Perhaps Barto thought that, too. Perhaps he thought that the absent and far distant little white boy was a thing of no importance whatever—if he did he was to find out his mistake later. Anyway, he told Renfrew and Deming that night quite frankly and openly, in his dignified, deliberate way, that while McLeod talked of what he was going to do with his gold when he'd got it all out, Barto sat there like a silent and impassive figure carved from black jade, and considered how he was going to take the gold away from him.

## CHAPTER XI

### WHAT LYFE WANTED

**T**HEN Desmond Lyfe came into the story. He came in with the first snow, behind a team of five hungry, savage dogs, cursing and swearing at them in his harsh cruel voice.

He ran his team up to the door of McLeod's shack, and bellowed for admittance.

"Come on, there!" he yelled imperiously. "Come out there, McLeod! Open up! A man can freeze to death in this cursed snow!"

The door of the shack opened, and black Barto stood in the doorway. He must have made a startling and impressive figure as he stood there, slightly stooping under the beam which held the doorjamb.

"What do you want?" he boomed in his deep voice.

He said that Lyfe stood, surprised, and that the Irishman's dogs yelped and snapped about him without restraint as he stood there, staring at the appearance of the black man.

"And he was frightened!" declared the murderer, proudly. "When he saw me there, he was frightened. I could see it in his eyes!"

"Isn't this McLeod's claim?" demanded Lyfe, and he turned on his dogs with a whip he had in his hand, lashing them into silence.

McLeod came to the door, elbowing Barto aside.

"It is," he said. "Come in and let us shut this door."

Lyfe hurried in, and Barto, closing the door, saw that it was now McLeod's turn to be afraid.

"How did you find me here?" he asked; and Barto, gazing at him very shrewdly, perceived that his fright was for his gold. McLeod was staring at Lyfe with a gaze which combined fear with disappointment.

"Don't be a fool!" Lyfe swore, jovially. "Your name's down in the land office records at Nome, and they're all talking about your find. You have all the luck, Mack."

"No, no," protested McLeod. He was a little, red-haired man, with a beard that seemed to cover all his face save his eyes, and he gazed at Lyfe like a terrier afraid of a whipping.

"It isn't a rich claim, Lyfe. It's a disappointment. It's not going to work out, I'm afraid. Not well, anyway."

Again Lyfe swore. He was black browed and bearded, swarthy of face, and harsh. That word suits Lyfe exceedingly well. He was a harsh man.

"Don't lie!" he swore. "It'll work out well enough for us. Who's the nigger?"

And, you know, when he said that, Lyfe, in a queer way, sealed his own death warrant. With his first coming to that shack, Barto had seen in Lyfe a rival in his greed for McLeod's gold—and you must remember that he was rapidly reaching the conclusion that it was excusable to commit murder to obtain possession of that metal. Then Lyfe called him a nigger. The black man never forgave Lyfe for that.

"I am Barto!" he boomed from his corner in reply to Lyfe's question. "You must not call me a nigger."

"Oh," said Lyfe, somewhat taken aback. "Barto!"

"Yes," said the black man, evenly. "Barto is my name. You must not call me a nigger. I do not let men call me a nigger."

All this he boomed out in his even, dignified manner, and



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his gigantic bulk, his savage, resolute face, gave his words an indescribable force. Up in the North, a man feels exceedingly isolated. At that moment Lyfe must have felt isolated with this great black man; a puny, insignificant force ranged against that irresistible bulk. He capitulated.

"It was just a figure of speech," he said.

"But," said Barto when he told his story to Renfrew that night at Sagrinay, "I knew then that he was my enemy. From that moment it was me or him. I knew it."

McLeod knew that Lyfe was his enemy, too. As a matter of fact, Lyfe made no secret of it, because it was not in his nature to conceal his enmity. In a harsh and brutal manner he regarded most men in that light, and it was his habit to override them, bully them, bulldoze and break them into an acceptance of that fact. Accordingly, he took possession of McLeod, his cabin, and his claim.

"When you left Seattle, Mack, I lent you seven hundred dollars," he said bluntly. "That ought to give me at least a three-quarters interest in your diggin's."

"Why don't you take it all?" cried McLeod bitterly.

"I might do that," mocked Lyfe.

So he joined them there in the shack, an unwelcome guest. And there were the three of them, each greedily determined that the store of gold with which they were isolated in that waste of snow should be his own. Barto used to sit in his dark, brooding silence and listen to the other two men wrangle over the increasing hoard. Lyfe was brutally, outspokenly, intent on stripping McLeod of as much as he could take, and McLeod was desperately determined to see that the turbulent Irishman got nothing. Neither of them suspected that the silent black man was planning, while they quarreled, to outwit them both.



## CHAPTER XII

### BARTO TAKES HIS CHOICE

**T**HE gold was piled up in little leather bags in a corner of the cabin. Little leather bags full of great riches which trickled out in golden streams whenever a bag burst open. This happened frequently, for neither Lyfe nor McLeod could leave the bags alone.

As the winter closed in upon them, they were forced to spend more and more of their time together in the shack. Because of the hatred which lay between them, they had little to say to one another, and they turned to the gold as if for companionship; just as, for companionship, a lonely man might turn to a dog.

McLeod used to draw up a stool beside the pile of little bags, and pat them softly, stroke them gently, almost as though he pitied them and would have consoled them. Then, very gently, he would move them, rearranging the pile, so that he might stroke and pat those which were hidden by the bags which lay on top. Lyfe would watch him jealously, with burning eyes, and then, when the rude sewing with which the bags were sealed burst open, he would leap from his seat and swear at McLeod for a fool. McLeod, silent and distressed, would then scrape from the floor every crumb of the precious metal and carefully sew up the gaping mouth of the little bag. Barto, black and gigantic, would lounge in his corner and watch these things with a somber gaze which betrayed to neither of the men what was in his mind.

One day, McLeod and Barto being busy at the wood pile,

Lyfe, alone in the shack, placed his own hungry hands upon the gold. He started picking up the bags and hefting them in his hands, guessing at the weight of each tight little sack of rawhide. Then a passion took possession of him, and he began taking up one after another, handling them with frenzied fervor, avidly desirous of having each and every sack in his two hands. He turned them over and over, he tore open one after another, and bathed his hands in the golden gravel they contained. He found himself upon the floor, fairly wallowing in a fortune of loose, yellow gold.

Outside, it occurred to Barto, as he stood, brandishing the ax above his head, while McLeod stooped near by lugging the heavy wood to the chopping block; it occurred to Barto how easily he might let slip one of his great blows, and split the skull of McLeod as easily as he split the crisp and frozen billets of wood. And McLeod, looking quickly up, must have seen something in the black man's face which betrayed what was in his mind, for he stood suddenly erect, and then, without a word, but with a face as white as the snow, he wheeled and hurried into the shack. He flung open the door and came as suddenly as that upon Lyfe, with the gold piled up about him.

The poor fellow let out a cry of anger, of horror and of fear, and Lyfe, off his guard, sprang up with a curse to meet McLeod's attack; for the frenzied miner leaped at his unwelcome guest like a madman.

Barto, who had continued with his wood chopping while his mind worked fast upon the query of whether McLeod had read his murderous thought or not, heard McLeod's cry, heard Lyfe's cursing, and heard the crash which the two bodies made as McLeod hurled himself upon Lyfe and bore him to the floor. Barto, flinging his ax aside, leaped for the cabin door.

When McLeod leaped upon him, Lyfe went down among the gold bags, with the other man's hands at his throat. Immediately Lyfe grasped McLeod's body in a bear hug with one arm, and his other arm he twisted behind him, reaching for his knife. His fingers closed upon the hasp of it, and he whipped it out, drawing back his arm for the thrust. At that instant Barto entered the cabin, and before the knife plunged home, he had whipped the body of McLeod out of Lyfe's mad embrace, flung the little miner to the other side of the room, and picked Lyfe up from the floor to shake him like a child until the knife clanged to the floor.

"Ah!" cried the black man in disgust. "You are like children!"

Lyfe cursed at him with passionate fluency, and McLeod picked himself up, dazed. Then there was a moment of silence as they both looked at Barto. Barto was gazing with glistening eyes upon the gold which littered the whole floor of the little shack. He looked up and saw them standing there.

"Are you going to leave—it—like this?" he asked. And he was conscious, as they were all conscious, of the fact that he had looked upon the gold over long.

"Get out and chop that wood!" growled Lyfe suddenly; and he fell on his knees, gathering up the scattered gold, sweeping it up as a man might sweep up an accumulation of dust on his parlor floor. McLeod came over and helped him.

"Go on," he said to Barto. "Go on out and chop that wood."

Barto went out and chopped the wood, and all that afternoon McLeod and Lyfe sat together with bowed heads, restoring the gold to its bags and sewing them up.

At supper time they sat down to a silent meal, which

was served only because Barto had prepared it without regard for their preoccupation. They had nearly finished supper when McLeod suddenly pushed back his chair and started up with an expression of fixed and desperate resolution.

"You have gone too far, Lyfe!" he cried. "It's all over, now!"

Lyfe leaned back in his chair and stared at McLeod as if the miner had gone crazy.

"What're you talking about?" he demanded.

"It's mine!" cried McLeod, in a tense and high-pitched voice. "Mine! All mine! Mine, and my boy's! You haven't got a share or a right in it! Every grain of that belongs to me!"

He paused for an instant and gulped, as though his words choked him. Then, forestalling Lyfe who, his face scarlet with anger, would have interrupted him, he rattled on.

"I starved for it! Groveled for it in the dirt! I ate dirt, and worked like a dog till I found it! Then I worked like a dog to pan it out! Like a dog! And I'd do it again for the boy! It's his! For him! His only! His alone! That little kid of a boy! And you won't have it, because tomorrow I take it down to the bank, Lyfe, and you don't get a shred of it! Not a grain of it!"

It was Lyfe who leaped to his feet, then.

"I don't, don't I?" he swore. "You little miser, you! You little rat-faced thief! Do you think you can hold back from me what's mine by right of good money? Do you suppose I can't break you with my two hands, and take your dirty gold to the last grain of dust? Who is it you think you're dealing with?"

"Barto!" cried McLeod; and hope flooded his eyes, his voice. "That's who I'm dealing with! And when you

speak of breaking a man, it's him you've got to deal with, too! I can depend on Barto! The boy can depend on Barto! And the two of us play together. Together we're protecting this gold for the kid, and together we're taking it to Nome in the morning! When will you start to break us, eh?" He snarled into Lyfe's dark, furious face.

Lyfe, whose anger had nearly had him at the other's throat, drew back at that, and he turned, ever so slightly, to face Barto who stood at the stove behind his left shoulder. Lyfe gazed at the black man curiously; and Barto stood there, solemnly, darkly, staring into Lyfe's angry eyes. He might have been carved from granite. He might have been an ancient idol, filled with the somber and unyielding mystery of the jungle.

"Barto," murmured Lyfe, as though to himself. Then he burst out with a rasping bellow of sound, as though to force into speech this graven image which stood so darkly regarding him.

"Is that true?" he roared. "Are you two devils lined up against me? Are you going to Nome with him in the morning?"

Barto turned his smoldering eyes upon his employer. McLeod was gazing at him with a mute and unmistakable appeal.

"Answer me!" roared Lyfe. "Answer me!" That seemed to be all he could say, although in his eyes was a depth of anger.

"Yes!" said Barto; and the dignity of his great voice filled the little cabin like the utterance of an oracle.

There was a little silence.

"You see?" sneered McLeod, triumphantly.

Lyfe stood staring at him, panting, tense, in an extremity of futile rage. Then, abruptly, and without another word,

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he turned to the door and flung himself from the cabin. When he returned, forced back to the warmth of the cabin by the deadly cold outside, it was to seat himself morosely beside the stove, and play his part in the profound silence which pervaded the little room.



## CHAPTER XIII

### LYFE SIGNS HIS DEATH WARRANT

**L**YFE, however, had no intention of surrendering without a struggle, and being aware that, with Barto, McLeod's forces far outstripped his own, he knew that it must be a struggle of wits. So while he sat silently beside the stove, his wicked and relentless mind turned over plan after plan whereby he might yet gain the ascendancy. And while he mused, there was in his imagination, a picture of Barto, the black man, as he had stood gazing upon the gold-strewn floor, lost for an instant in a passion of greedy desire.

Lyfe knew that whatever plans he made must be executed within the passing of a single night, and it seemed that circumstances were against him; for McLeod and Barto were two, while he stood all alone. Throughout the night they could watch—indeed, even as he sat there, brooding, they made their plans to watch, turn and turn about, with the rifle between them—and it was not probable that they would permit him even to arise from his bed. No man, surely, could have been more helpless, more impotent to do evil, or overcome his odds, than Lyfe was that night in the tiny cabin; and yet he did it. He was strong enough for that; he was cunning enough and relentless enough to have his way even though Black Barto stood like a barrier between him and the thing he desired.

Silently he turned over his plans, and when, finally, he perfected them and polished them in every detail, they had the virtue of a magnificent simplicity.

Barto took the first watch that night. Lyfe obediently retired into his sleeping bag at the black man's suggestion, and McLeod turned in gratefully, for he was very tired. As a matter of fact, it is probable that even that night, he was far from well. Hard work, poor food, the deadly cold, and constant worry, must have greatly exhausted him. He rolled up in his sleeping bag and almost immediately fell asleep.

Outside the wind was blowing a gale which roared and whined about the cabin in weird discords. Barto, the rifle across his knees, sat beside the stove and gazed into the red glare which was revealed by the open top, for he had removed the cover to obtain a greater heat. You can picture him there, a gigantic form in the little room, with the flame reflected in his eyes, and painting the high contours of his black face a fearsome red. And you can picture Lyfe, rolled up in his sleeping bag, peering out at that Satanic figure with sleepless eyes, until, the night half gone, Barto awakened McLeod to take his turn.

McLeod made a far less heroic picture as he huddled near the blaze; and, aware of this, he clutched the rifle more tightly to him, and strove to banish the little devils of fatigue which dragged at his eyelids and tortured his worn frame. He was only to watch two hours, and for the better part of the first hour he must have sat there, all unconscious that Lyfe was staring at him with unblinking, watchful eyes. We can't be sure how long it was before Lyfe bestirred himself, any more than we can be sure of anything which followed that bestirring. Barto was able to tell Renfrew only what McLeod was able to tell, later, as Barto bore him to the hospital at Nome. And that is all any one in the world knows of what took place.

Anyway, Lyfe bestirred himself. And when McLeod, presenting the gleaming barrel of the rifle, would have

awakened Barto, Lyfe anxiously reassured him. You can picture that for yourself.

"Don't wake him," Lyfe must have pleaded. "He's treacherous!" Something of that sort, he must have said, bringing the little man to a dreadful, horrified attention.

"Treacherous? Barto?"

"Yes, treacherous! Didn't you see him look at that gold when he stopped us fighting! I tell you he'd commit murder for it!"

And poor McLeod remembered. Also, he remembered the look he had seen in Barto's eyes when the black man brandished the ax aloft. And his heart must have fallen terribly. Put yourself in his place. Alone in the wilderness with those two men. Hopeless of assistance, seeing only greed, and murderous greed at that, in these two companions who, each fighting the other, were both arrayed against him.

"Oh, my God!" he moaned.

Then, suddenly suspicious:

"Why are you telling this to me?"

Lyfe shrugged his shoulders.

"We are two white men," he said. "I couldn't sleep for thinking of it. Lord knows I'm no angel, and I ain't concealing the fact that I want a share of your winnings. But one white man can't see another one taken in by a coon."

McLeod played nervously with the rifle, turning toward the black man, who slept like a tired boy. Lyfe seized the barrel gently.

"No," he whispered. "No. That would be murder."

Poor McLeod turned back to him, his eyes shifting about the room, his mouth drawn. Hunted, at bay, he knew not where to turn.

"What shall I do?" he moaned. "What shall I do?"

Lyfe frowned.

"Shall I tell you?" he asked. McLeod nodded.

"Run for it," said Lyfe.

McLeod stared at him, turning this over in his mind.

"Get out before the coon wakes up," advised Lyfe. "Take the dogs now, and go. Now! Don't you understand? That black devil will murder both of us!"

McLeod had not ceased to stare at him. Now he smiled, a pitiful, afflicted smile.

"But why?" he sighed. "Why do you tell me to do that? What will *you* make out of it?" You see, he had no confidence in Lyfe. Lyfe could not fool him to that extent, for McLeod knew his man too well. And Lyfe had no illusions about it. His cunning had taken that into consideration, too.

"Nothing," he said harshly. "Nothing—now. I'm just saving you and your gold from Barto. That doesn't let you out. But we can make peace for a little while and settle between us later."

Just what particular words passed between them, Renfrew, and no one else in the world, will ever know. It is certain that they said this much in their own way, and it is certain that Lyfe, that sinister and greedy spirit, persuaded poor McLeod to take the dogs and go. There was something else which passed between them before his going, and Lyfe must have handled that part of it with an iron nerve, for while Barto slept in the same small, squalid room, he prevailed upon McLeod to draw up and sign a document which, if Barto had awakened, would have been sufficient to bring down upon him then and there the black man's deadly vengeance. But Barto did not waken, and Lyfe, in the ruddy glow of the open stove, saw his victim scrawl the words which were to lead, years later, to that murder which brought Barto face to face with Renfrew, to pour out his story with childlike earnestness across the table in the Police Post at Sagrinay.

Then McLeod fled. He fled with his dogs and a sleigh loaded with little else but gold, into a particularly bitter gale, which, before morning was to sweep down upon him a white and suffocating storm of snow.

Barto, whom McLeod was to have called when his two hours were up, slept on until dawn. He drew himself from his sleeping bag like a monster from its lair, and saw only Lyfe in the room with him, sleeping peacefully in his corner.

Mystified, Barto lighted a lamp, and discovered immediately that the gold was gone. With a bound he was out of the cabin, and in a moment had confirmed his suspicion. McLeod with the dogs and sled, with the gold, and with insufficient food, had fled in the night. Made furious by this discovery, Barto flung Lyfe out of his corner and out of his sleeping bag with a single sweep of his arm.

"Where is he?" he roared; and Lyfe, staring up at him, saw the image of death gleaming in the black man's eyes. Like a frightened animal he wriggled into a corner, and struggled to his feet.

"What's the matter?" he cried throatily, for he was frightened.

"McLeod! The gold!" Barto raged. "What have you done with him?"

Of course it was Lyfe's part to seem surprised. To be as amazed by McLeod's disappearance as Barto was. He found it difficult in the face of the giant's anger to play his part as well as he would have wished to, but he did it well enough. Barto's anger became tempered by bewilderment.

"How do I know where he's gone?" cried Lyfe. "How do I know it isn't a trick of yours to cheat me?"

The black man stared at him suspiciously.

"Listen, you!" he boomed. "Before you came to this place, I, too, wanted his gold. That is what I came for. That is all I desired. McLeod had the gold, and I wanted it.



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But when you came here, you showed me how mean and low that was. To want another man's gold. The gold of a little, unprotected boy!

"You are something lower and dirtier than dirt, Lyfe, and I could not be like you. I could not be as low as that. So I said that I would protect this foolish McLeod from you. I said that I would see his gold taken safely into Nome. I would see that you were put in your place; in the gutter. I am going to do that."

He pounced suddenly forward, and with one hand took Lyfe by the throat. Seeing retribution and death in the black man's eyes, Lyfe shrieked, but the hand of the black man stifled the sound of it. And now Barto's voice rolled majestically onward.

"I am going to do that!" he cried. "And you will not stop me. I could kill you now, and this is to show you that I speak the truth!"

His great hand closed terribly, and Lyfe's face turned purple. Then the great arm moved with a jerk, and Lyfe was flung away.

"Like that!" cried the black man.

"And now I am going to follow him. If he has suffered—if you have tricked him—I am coming back. Then I shall kill you. And you cannot escape me, because I shall follow you to every place you go. I shall follow you. If you have the gold I shall take it. And your life I shall take as well!"

He turned away from the wretched man and tore from the nails upon which they hung, his parka, his snowshoes. He dressed, rapidly, determinedly, and having dressed, having made a pack with his sleeping bag of what provisions he required, he opened the door and left the cabin without another glance at his fallen enemy.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE END OF THE BLACK MAN'S TALE

**B**ARTO found McLeod in the snow. He was covered by it, and hedged about in it. He lay beside the trail in his sleeping bag, having crawled into it when he had fallen exhausted and overcome.

Barto took the unconscious form from its covering and strove heroically to bring it back to life. This much he did by dint of his great strength. He brought McLeod back to life, and whilst he fed him hot food, listened to his tale of how Lyfe had used the hours while Barto had been asleep. Only McLeod made no mention of that document; for the gold was piled up on the sleigh outside, and McLeod did not trust the black man enough to tell him everything.

"Take everything to the bank. Put everything in the bank!" he pleaded weakly. "I'm sick, and while I'm sick, I want everything kept safe. Everything I'm carrying with me. My papers!"

Barto promised this, and then accomplished the impossible.

By his great strength he bore McLeod alive to the hospital at Nome, and he brought the gold in with him. Even as he had promised, everything belonging to McLeod was placed in trust at the bank, and everything done to make him comfortable. Then Barto set out again for the cabin in the gold fields. He told the authorities at Nome nothing about the part which Lyfe had played in the drama which had brought McLeod to the hospital. He set out to attend to that for himself. And while he traveled the trail to the lonely cabin, McLeod died of pneumonia at Nome.

On his arrival at the cabin, Barto found that Lyfe had flown, and he had to return again to Nome with his deep and smoldering vengeance unsatisfied. Discovering that McLeod was dead, he approached the bankers, curious as to the disposal which was to be made of the gold. They told him that among McLeod's papers had been found a document which bequeathed the entire sum to his five-year-old son, Scott McLeod, to be held in trust for the boy by whoever was appointed the youngster's guardian. And Barto discovered that he was disappointed. He was bitterly disappointed; for in his heart he had always desired that gold, that yellow metal, which made the white men kings.

Thereafter, Barto devoted himself to an unending search for Desmond Lyfe. He had to invoke great patience for this, because Lyfe had left Alaska, and Barto had no money to follow him, even if he had known where he was.

You see, Lyfe had laid his plans quickly, that night in the cabin, but he had laid them cleverly, too. He knew that the boy, Scott McLeod had been left in care of some farmer folk in McLeod's old home at some Alberta village. So he prevailed upon McLeod to make that will, putting the gold in charge of whoever was named the boy's guardian. Then he came down to Alberta, adopted the boy in his rôle of the father's only friend, the man who had lent him money to go north—and settled at Sagrinay.

He gained possession of enough of the treasure in that way to set himself up as a successful farmer, and then set about getting his hands upon the rest of it. It was slow work, but finally Lyfe lost patience with legal technicalities and demanded that the entire fortune be placed in his hands as the boy's guardian. To do this, legal papers had to be filed at Nome, and to see the papers properly executed the authorities had to get in touch with none other than Barto,

who still worked out his unhappy destiny as a dog driver in the gold fields.

So, in the end, you see, Barto learned that Lyfe was to have all the gold; and also he learned where Lyfe was to be found. But you must remember, he knew nothing about Lyfe's guardianship of the boy.

All this Barto told the two redcoats at the police post at Sagrinay.

"And what did you do then?" asked Renfrew. For the black man had come to a pause.

"I came to Sagrinay," said Barto grimly. "I came and found him there. 'I have found you at last, Lyfe,' I said to him; and he was frightened. 'Now,' I said, 'you must give it all to me.'"

"I think he would have done it, too, but you," he grinned somberly at Renfrew. "You came along with that grocer, who had a grievance against Lyfe because Lyfe desired to take his home away from him. I rode back to town with that grocer. That Murdock; and he said to me, 'If you will kill this man, Lyfe, I will see that you are not punished for it.' So he promised, and we rode quickly out to Lyfe's farm. He was standing on the porch when we drove in through the back road, and I called to him. 'You are a dead man, now,' I called. He turned to me, and he was afraid. He ran toward me, and I shot him with the rifle which the grocer had given me. That is all."

"That was enough," said Deming.

"If you had not come back again to Lyfe's house, you would still be free," said Renfrew. "Why did you come back?"

The black man shrugged his shoulders.

"For the gold," he said simply. "I came back for the gold, and all I found was papers—papers. I read them, and they told me that whoever desired the gold must have

the boy. While I was reading them the boy came. He came into the room like a fool, with a gun in his hand, and then I said, 'This is funny. I must have that boy, and here he comes to me.' So I stole the boy. That is how you caught me."

And, you know, he spoke the truth. That simple giant, with his learning and his fixed, determined mind, really believed that by stealing the boy, Scott McLeod, he could gain possession of the yellow metal which the unfortunate McLeod had grubbed out of the northern gravel to be a curse and a temptation to these passionate and ambitious men.

## CHAPTER XV

### SCOTTY TAKES A DRIVE

WITH the capture of Barto, half Renfrew's work was done. The other half would consist of capturing Barto's accomplice, and it would have been done in much the same manner as boys play Prisoner's-base had not Dick Ranney appeared to upset the plans of police and fugitive alike.

The beginning of the end of Murdock, the grocer, occurred when Dick Ranney drove through Sagrinay in a four-wheeled buckboard. Scotty saw him from the upper story of the Mounted Police Post which overlooks one end of the Main Street, and he was at once struck by the splendor of Dick's appearance.

Dick was accustomed to that. He was at that time sixteen years old, stood six feet two in his stockings, was crowned with a thatch of red-golden hair, and tilted his face habitually upward so that he seemed perpetually challenging fate to do its worst. That is why he was accustomed to the curious and friendly glances of all who saw him, although he was serenely unconscious of the splendor which attracted them.

Scott McLeod, almost sixteen himself, but small, wiry, a bunch of quick, nervous life, saw this figure as it drew in with strong arms the spirited bay mare that fought the bridle at the reins' end, and was enchanted by it. He ran down stairs with the lightfooted speed which was peculiar to him, and dashed out of the house all agarin.

"Hello!" he sang out. "Anything I can do for you?"

For Dick Ranney, holding the fractious mare with easy unconcern, was obviously at a loss for information. He smiled down on Scotty, while the mare danced this way and that, making the wheels of the buckboard grate in the mud of the road.

"Where's Bramhall Ranch?" he yelled. "Look out! She'll bite!" But Scotty approached the tall mare and pacified her with a light hand at the muzzle and a few soft words. Ranney stared at him in wonder.

"I'll have to call you Daniel," he said, grinning. "Can you tell me where Bramhall Ranch is?"

"Almost anywhere," said Scotty. "I've never heard of the place."

"It was run by an easterner called Friedman," explained Dick. "He had a weakness for grand names because he made his fortune selling digestive tablets. He took up ranching as a new way to spend money without pain. Raised horses that turned up their eyes and died. Then he sold hides. Then he quit ranching. A big skinny man with a large nose. Named Friedman."

"I know," said Scotty. "We call the place Scratched Rock Farm, because it's nothing but rocks and post oak bog. They cheated him when he took it."

"That's just the place," grinned Dick, silkily. "I recognize it at once as typical of the place my father would buy. How do I get there?"

"Through the town, and over nineteen wagon roads that you can't see unless you've got an eye for wheel ruts. I'll take you out there. I've got to see Renfrew."

"Who's that?" Dick drew up the reins again, for Scotty was climbing up beside him, and the mare was immediately restive.

"He's the Mounted Police Constable of this post. They're watching your Scratched Rock Farm."



"Why? Am I wanted by the police? How exciting!" He had the reins in both hands now, holding the great mare by sheer force to an excited trot through the main street.

"No, not you. They want a man named Murdock, and he's been reported out in that direction."

"What d' they want him for? Hold hard, idiot!" This last to the horse who seemed suddenly bent upon entering Tutewhiler's General Store. "Sorry!" He grinned the apology over his shoulder to Mr. Tutewhiler who was grieved at the upsetting by a hind wheel of two piles of iron buckets.

"Murder," said Scotty.

"Ah," said Dick. "That's bad. Whom did he kill?"

"Man named Lyfe."

Dick laughed.

"That's good! Lyfe. Fancy murdering life." He grinned at the thought. "How did it happen?"

"With a gun," explained Scotty. "They had a quarrel over some money that Murdock owed Lyfe. Lyfe was a mean man. He was hard and cruel, and greedy. I worked for him, and I know. He thought he owned me body and soul. Anyway, he was going to have that money from Murdock or ruin him; take over his store and all his property. So there they were, quarreling. . . . You'd best be careful or she'll get away from you."

"Quite right," said Dick cheerfully. "She's a fiend of a horse."

He was sitting at the extreme edge of his seat, driving the mare with all the form and precision of an expert horseman. Elbows in, head erect, shoulders straight, and hands close together, he played the hard-mouthed mare on the end of the reins as a fisherman plays a maddened tarpon before he lands it. There was a moment while they were silent; while the mare fought to turn from the road and climb

the bank beside it. Again Dick triumphed; again the mare fell into her constrained and nervous trot.

"And then what happened?" asked Dick.

"Murdock went to Renfrew; he's the Mounted Police Constable, you know. Murdock demanded that Renfrew arrest Lyfe, because Lyfe went after me with a horse whip."

Ranney glanced down upon him sideways.

"Dirty dog!" he said.

"I'd have killed him if he hit me!" snapped Scotty between his teeth.

"Of course, you would," said Dick. "Sportsman," he added.

"But before Renfrew got out there—out to Lyfe's ranch—a queer sort of a black man who looked like an Indian came to see Lyfe, and he got after Lyfe with an ax. That's when Renfrew came on the scene."

"Hooray!" sang out Dick. "Just like the movies!" He twitched an elbow and swerved the mare into the ruts of the road, to miss the edge of a ditch by inches. "She nearly got me that time," he said cheerfully.

Scotty hung tightly to the rail beside his seat.

"She'll do it yet. She wants to shake off the buckboard," he said.

"Sure," agreed Dick. "And she'll do it, some day." Scotty admired the play of the tall boy's fine body as he glimpsed it beneath the light texture of his white tennis shirt.

"What did he do—Renfrew?" asked Dick.

"Took all of us into Sagrinay. But while he was up in the office of McKeaver, the probate judge, trying to get me freed from Lyfe, Murdock and the black man drove out to the ranch and shot Lyfe dead. Murdock got the black man to do it, I guess. Anyway they're still hunting for Murdock."

"But they got the black man?"

"Sure, they got him," admitted Scotty modestly, and he remembered with a shiver the night when he had thought the black man might send him the same way as Lyfe had gone. "But Murdock got away. Renfrew is a darned fine detective, and he's been on the trail ever since. He felt pretty sure Murdock would come back here, because he'll need money to get away with, and he's got lots of relatives around Sagrinay. So Renfrew looked out, and sure enough, he found that a man of his description has been seen by two or three of the natives. He's watching the Scratched Rock place, because that's been deserted so long it's the logical place for a man to take refuge. I guess we're closing in on him slowly but surely."

"Oh, we are, are we?" smiled Dick.

Scotty blushed. It was a trait which he himself deeply deplored, that he must betray his every feeling by that quick blush.

"Well," he explained. "Renfrew and I play together now. You see he's adopting me. He's a fine man for a fellow to be adopted by."

Ranney glanced at him again with that quick, sidelong glance.

"Sportsman," he murmured. "Say, can you drive?"

"Sure," said Scotty. "Want me to relieve you?"

"Not right away," grinned Dick. "But if this nightmare I'm driving pulls away at her bit much longer, I'm going to lose a couple of arms."

"What's the matter with her? Is her bit too sharp?"

"No, it's these wide open spaces of song and story. When she sees a clear stretch like this, she thinks it's up to her to show speed. She was reared for the trotting track or the slaughterhouse; she thinks she can shine as a speedster. Whoa! . . . Which way now?"

In spite of his effort, the mare had overrun the point where two trails diverged.

"Keep right on," advised Scotty; and it was at that instant the tumbleweed struck the fractious mare upon the nose. Without waiting for Dick to urge her, she kept right on.

"We're in for it now!" exclaimed Dick brightly, as he found himself powerless to control the excited animal.

"What's the matter?" cried Scotty.

"Ask her!" grinned Dick; and both boys clung to the rails which edged the seat as the great mare, conscious of Dick's helplessness, abandoned herself to a mad passion of speed which impelled her to greater speed. Like a red devil she tore wildly along the wagon track, Dick sawing the reins vainly behind her; and the buckboard bounced and screamed with strain, as she whirled it over bumps and ridges.

Scotty sat frozen in his seat, helpless in the face of sure disaster. Dick, his eyes ablaze, his body crouching forward as he stood behind the dashboard, was throwing his whole weight into the task of pulling the bay mare in; but she had the bit in her teeth, and, her head stretched forward, held a leverage which he was powerless to break.

"The dear thing's very agitated," said Dick, catching Scotty's eye. "Wonder whether the old wagon will outlast her wind?"

"There's a bad bit of road ahead!" yelled Scotty.

"All right, but it's no use yelling, she wouldn't pay any attention to you even if she heard you; and I can't do anything about it."

Scotty blushed.

"There's a gully," he explained. "If she runs us into that, we'll be scattered over five counties. Better choose a soft place and jump."

"Not me," said Dick. "Never cheat yourself out of the

end of an adventure." A bound of the buckboard almost threw him over the dash. With the reins still in his hands he sank back to his seat.

"I always want to see what's at the bottom of gullies, anyway," he gasped, and sawed with all the strength of his body.

"You will," said Scotty. "Look at that!"

The trail ahead swept grandly to the edge of a deep gash in the earth, the steep walls of which were clad with a black fur of stunted, twisted growth; then, turning, the wagon road skirted the very brim of this forbidding gully so that the badly graded edges of it invited the most careful driver to upset himself into the oblivion of that dark pit. The bay mare was plunging blindly toward this twist in the road, while the buckboard was, by virtue of her mad career, made to veritably rise from the ground and wave behind her. It literally hit only the high spots of the trail.

Dick arose from his seat and passed the reins to Scotty.

"What are you g-g-going t' do?" The cry was jolted out of Scotty's lips by the lurch of the wagon. "Don't jump!" he yelled.

"If I could get on her back," boomed Dick, coolly, "I'd ride her ragged." And he coolly essayed to climb over the dashboard.

"Don't do it!" yelled Scotty. "You're crazy!" And he tried to grab Dick's shirt.

"I got you into it!" The cry came back to Scotty as Dick's great body plunged beautifully over the dashboard. "I'll get you out!" And the daredevil youth was on the mare's back, astride, and gripping the reins close behind the animal's straight neck.

Scotty slackened the reins to give Dick leeway, but out of the tail of his eye he saw the black maw of the gully sweeping toward them. He pictured the accident; the mare



head over heels with Dick beneath her, the mess of the wreckage at the gully's bottom.

"Come back!" he yelled. "You ole fool! Back! Come back! She'll mash you to a jelly!"

At that point the mare reached the twist of the trail. Obviously she had no eyes for the gully. Madly, she was bound to plunge into it, and the boy on her back seemed to madden her the more. But, also, the boy on her back was determined to change her course at that twist in the trail. He gathered the reins in his hands and edged forward, jockey-like, his feet upon the traces. Then, crouching over her shoulders, he crossed the reins behind the mare's stretched neck, and with the leverage procured by this purchase, he crossed his hands and mightily twisted the mare's head around. She slowed her pace then, and, for a moment, fought him. But he conquered. With a plunge which brought her head down almost to the ground, the bay mare was twisted into the trail, and brought her head rearing aloft again with the precarious stretch of road that skirted the gully before her.

She plunged mightily then, and again tore forward; tore madly, blindly forward without constraint and without check; for in that plunge which turned her from the trail she had hurled the heavy figure of Dick Ranney from her back so that he sailed through the air like a great rag doll and plunged from sight into the black and distorted jungle which hid the gully's depth.



## CHAPTER XVI

### RANNEY TAKES COMMAND

SCOTTY saw his splendid friend thus hurled into oblivion with a sudden sickness of horror; but it was the sickness of an instant, for here he was being carried away from his injured friend at breakneck speed over a precarious trail, and the reins were in his hands. So he gathered them up and used them.

Now there are two ways to manage a frantic horse. One is the way of an expert horseman, who by long practice has learned the technically correct thing to do; that was Dick Ranney's way. The other way cannot be learned in riding schools, for it is a queer, subtle way. It is the way of a man who can feel through his reins just what moves in the mind of his horse, and can signal through those reins a perfect understanding; and that, since first he felt a horse beneath him, had been the way of Scotty McLeod.

He used it now, with calm words that were given him by the spirit that makes men understand fine horses. His wide, small hands pulled firmly at the reins, then gave, then pulled then gave, and pulled again. Calmly, firmly, without great force, without panic, he sat in that plunging, whipping buck-board, and gave and pulled, while he spoke in a voice loud enough to reach the distracted animal and calm enough to reassure her. In an amazingly short time he was driving a running horse in perfect control. In another moment, he was able to draw her in, to let her stand, quivering, while he leaped out and calmed her with his touch, and with his hands at the bridle and upon her neck turned her into the back trail.

Then he brought her trotting back to the spot where Dick had disappeared. With a queer sensation which caused his heart to beat uncomfortably, and a panic of apprehension to lie, repressed, beneath it, he made the mare fast to a stunted tree, and fought his way down through the thick underbrush, making for the spot where he was afraid Dick's body would be found.

He was like a terrier looking for a lost golf ball, and his search took him along the side of that steep declivity, through a tearing, baffling barrier of tangled scrub which scratched his skin and tore his clothing, while his ankles were twisted under him by the broken sloping ground beneath his feet.

He found no body. All that he found, finally, was the spot where Dick had fallen; and that spot was a landslide which had taken the thick undergrowth in a chaos of stone and gravel to the bottom of the gully, leaving only patches to deceive the eye with an illusion of jungle where no jungle was. Only, at the bottom of the gully had the unconquerable life of that tough growth crept over the piled gravel and re-established itself in a thick barrier. Down to this barrier Scotty crept, and there he observed with pleasure that some one had crawled through it before him. Some one, indeed, appeared to have crawled through it before Dick, for the tunnel through the brush which had attracted Scotty's attention seemed, upon examination, to have been cut out rather than broken by the passage of a single body. Yet Scotty did not stop to debate the point. He followed the tunnel on his hands and knees.

He followed it until he saw from the concealment it afforded, a small clearing in the bottom of the gully; and that clearing was a camp. In front of a lean-to built of brush sat a squat, unhappy looking man with broad, thick lips which revealed the unbecoming fact that several of his front teeth were missing. He held a rifle in his hands and at the

moment Scotty first saw him was gazing with wrinkled forehead, as though puzzled, upon the face of Dick Ranney, who sat, tailor fashion, before him.

"The point I'm trying to make," Dick was saying, "is that you're behaving like a particular species of fool. That's silly."

The man continued to gaze upon him with his forehead wrinkled like a monkey's.

"You ought to be able to see that it's an accident," continued Dick. "My horse ran away and heaved me into this hole. I don't mean you any harm. If you're a bootlegger or something, you can go right on bootlegging for all I care. I won't even drop a hint that there's anything down here but a few rabbits and a jackass."

He shifted his position slightly, and the man instantly brought up his rifle; but he said nothing and made no sound. Dick grinned impatiently.

"You can't keep me here forever," he said. "They'll be sure and come for me."

At that the man scowled, but still he said nothing. Dick flared up.

"Well, what d'you intend to do? What's the idea, if you have any?"

The man seemed to puzzle over that for a moment. Then he spoke. His voice was something more of a growl than a voice, but his missing teeth provided it with the grotesque quality of a lisp.

"I'm keepin' you till the bothth cometh," he said. "If he'th got brainth he'll bump you orf."

Dick stared at him in amazement.

"You mean—" He stopped short and laughed. "You're crazy!" he cried. "He wouldn't want to commit murder!"

"He hath," growled the man. "That'th why he'll bump you orf if he'th got brainth."

Then he comprehended what he had said. A thunder cloud of fury gathered in his eyes, only to clear up and leave him with the old, puzzled look.

"Now he'll have to," he growled with resignation. "We'll have to move you away from here and bump you orf. We can't let you get away now." He fingered the rifle contemptatively. "You'd give uth away," he explained.

Scotty didn't listen to what followed. It consisted chiefly of subtle and ridiculous argumentation on Dick's part against being bumped off. Scotty sensed that beneath his even, whimsical air, the tall boy was gathering himself to leap upon the man, and he was occupied himself with the consideration of how best he might be of help. Even while he sought about for some weapon, there was the sound of a heavy body moving in the brush, and out of the thicket behind the dugout, Murdock, the grocer, plunged into view.

He comprehended the situation at a glance and a mask of fear flashed over his fat, pasty face. Instantly cunning overcame that fear, and he sprang to the side of the lisping man.

"He'th found uth," lisped that animal.

Murdock snatched the gun out of his hand, and Scotty, seized with fear for his friend, would have plunged forward, but Murdock did not fire.

"Stand still!" he squealed at Dick, who had leaped to his feet. Then, to the lisping man: "Tie him up!" And he rolled forward to poke the muzzle of the gun into Dick's ribs.

"How do you do?" murmured Dick pleasantly. "Didn't see anything of a runaway horse as you came along, did you?"

"Shut up!" squealed Murdock. "Tie him! Tight!" he ordered. And the man who lisped trussed the splendid youngster tightly as he stood there.

"Now what are you going to do?" sneered the grocer; and his voice trembled with excitement.

"Accept your very kind invitation to extend my visit," smiled Dick. "Although, I promise you, Mr. Murdock, if I had a friend within hearing I'd tell him to run directly to the police and have you taken up within an hour. Now what do you think of that?"

And he said it in such a manner that Scotty, with a thrill of admiration, divined that his fine, tall friend had seen him or sensed his presence and was in this astonishing way telling him what to do. He saw at once that Dick was right. This was no situation to try and handle with a grandstand play. It was a moment for team work, and Renfrew must be one of the team. He slid silently up the slope again and made for the buckboard like a slim, fleet animal.

Alone, in the gully, Dick faced his odds. Murdock was obviously appalled and enraged by the discovery that Dick knew who he was, and why he was there. He held the muzzle of the gun against the boy's body and his finger trembled at the trigger. Dick didn't flinch. He stood there, straight as a young tree, and gazed with peculiar spirit into the fat man's little eyes.

"Don't worry about killing me," he said at last. "You won't."

"Why won't I?" snarled Murdock.

"Because you can't." said Dick. "You haven't got the nerve."

Murdock's small eyes gleamed at him with relentless hatred. Then he stepped backward and smiled meanly.

"He will," said he, indicating the squat man, who lisped. "He'd do it with an ax for ten dollars."

He turned to the gentleman who possessed this agreeable attribute.

"What shall we do with him?" he asked.



Again the brow wrinkled, and the man's gray eyes were puzzled.

"If you got brainth," he growled. "Bump him orf."

Murdock leered at Dick spitefully.

"There you are," he said. "He'll do it, too, in a jiffy."

Dick turned his head so that he stared straight into the gray eyes of the man who lisped.

"No, he won't," he said; and he smiled. It was a smile of peculiar understanding, and, meeting it, the brows of the man who lisped became suddenly unruffled. His loose lips closed, and he gazed back into the boy's face with an expression which was completely unreadable. Yet Dick seemed to read it. He stood there in his bonds, towering above them both, a gigantic youth, whose body seemed filled with a life and vigor that strained the ropes which bound him. And his fine face, his straight gaze, framed by his burning shock of hair, invested him with an attribute which was nobility.

"What's your name?" he asked.

As though startled, the man answered him without hesitation.

"Paxton," he said. His lisp made it sound like, "Pacthton."

"Do you think you could kill me, Paxton?" asked Dick, evenly.

Paxton's brows came down in an agony of thought.

"How do I know?" he said, finally.

"Well, I'll tell you," said Dick. "It's like this. You will kill a man for ten dollars because killing a man is a thing you don't mind doing. But you can't kill me for ten dollars, because I'm not that kind of man. I know the kind you are, and you know the kind I am. My brother was killed at Ladysmith in the Boer war, but before he died he led a group of his men through an attack in the face of fifty machine guns. After he was killed his men cried. They bawled



like kids. And they were your kind. You'd kill for ten dollars because you only know such scum as this fat hound. But I know the kind of man you are. Kill for ten dollars! Lord, you're the kind who would die for nothing, if you ever found a man like my brother, worth dying for!"

He paused for a moment, and there was a queer glint in his eyes. Murdock, his jaw drooping, was gazing fixedly upon the man who lisped; but Paxton's eyes were glued upon Dick's, and his brow was unruffled, his gray eyes clear, as though they had been washed clean of something that had clouded them.

"I try to be like him," said Dick slowly. "I try to think I'm as good a man as he was. Old Kenneth."

Then suddenly his eyes blazed up, and his voice rang like a bell in the gully.

"Take that rifle, Paxton!" he commanded. "Down him!"

The fat grocer stood for a moment completely bereft of volition. Paxton sent back to Dick's blazing eyes a glance of utter devotion, grinned happily and hurled himself on the grocer. With one hand he twisted the rifle from the fat man's grasp, and with the other he bashed Murdock to the earth.

"Now cut these ropes!" Dick's voice rang with an amazing, happy triumph. And in another instant the boy who had lost the bay mare because he had tried to subdue a spirit proud as his, stood free above the captured murderer while beside him, with the rifle in hand, stood a devoted follower who twenty minutes earlier would have slain him for a ten-dollar bill.

Thirty minutes later Dick, swinging along beside the squat form of Paxton who held Murdock under the rifle in front of him, came upon Scotty and Renfrew in the wagon road leading to Scratched Rock Farm. Scotty was driving the bay mare at a mad gallop while Renfrew kept beside the

buckboard astride his police horse. Dick stared in amazement as he saw Scotty without perceptible effort draw the mare to a halt. Scotty, dismounting from the buckboard, came forward and calmed the animal's unrest with a touch and a word. Renfrew, with a word of greeting, vaulted from his saddle and immediately slipped manacles on Murdock.

"I'm not a ghost," laughed Scotty at the perplexed face of Dick. "What have you done, bought that cutthroat off?" His eyes followed Paxton, who, his delivery made, strolled around to the rear of the buckboard and placed the gun under the seat.

"No," said Dick, and his voice had in it a peculiar quality. He seemed to at once praise Paxton and take pride in him. It was the quality which had won men to his brother, who had died. "Paxton's one of the best," he said. "A man for a fellow to have with him in a tight place. He's going to stand by me for good, after this." And he smiled across at the man who lisped.

Paxton acknowledged the smile with a sheepish curl of his lips; then, without a word, he gave Renfrew a hand about putting the crestfallen grocer into the buckboard. He carefully took up the rifle once again.

"Better for me to have it than him," he growled.

Dick laughed. Then he spoke to Scotty very seriously.

"You'd better drive," he said. "And you'd better keep the mare for yourself. How you managed to handle her, Lord knows. I guess I just lack the ability to manage things."

Renfrew, who had been eyeing the boy with some admiration, spoke to him from his place in the saddle beside the mare.

"We'll get to the bottom of all this back at the post," he said. "How did you lose control of the mare?"

Dick grinned sheepishly.

## *RANNEY TAKES COMMAND*

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"They all said she'd kill me some time, and I guess that appealed to my vanity. So I always drove her in that spirit. You know. 'You'll submit to me, or I'll break you!' sort of thing." He clenched his fists to illustrate the spirit of his remark. Renfrew smiled broadly.

"I guess you've still got to learn what it means to take command," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Dick. "I guess so."

When later, at the police post, Renfrew got to the bottom of Dick's adventure, his smile was not so broad.

## CHAPTER XVII

### SCOTTY'S JOB

THE Ranney family did remarkable things to the abandoned Scratch Rock Farm, and Scotty, who wanted a job, found one with Jason Burritt, who raised pigs and did carpentry work. When the big ranch house was ready for Dick's family to occupy it, however, Burritt found no more use for an apprentice; but he liked Scotty and for some days kept him employed about odd jobs.

Then one evening Scotty came back to the police post and found Renfrew at the desk in the orderly room with a pile of various small booklets at his elbows. Scotty came in and put one hand on Renfrew's shoulder.

"I lost my job," he said.

Renfrew swung around in his seat.

"What's the matter?" he asked with sympathy. "Bad work?"

"No," said Scotty. "It's just that Jason can't afford an extra hand. He said that my six dollars a week was just about what he made out of the carpentry work, now that his work on the Ranney farm is finished." Scotty frowned at the opposite wall.

"It's tough luck," he said. "Because there isn't much else I can do around the village here."

"That's all right," said Renfrew. "I've got another job for you."

Scotty brightened.

"What?"

Renfrew stared thoughtfully at the little booklets on the desk.

"You'll have to go to school, Scotty," he said. And Scotty saw that the booklets were catalogues of various preparatory schools in all parts of North America. His face fell.

"You mean go away from here?" he said at last. His voice was very feeble.

Renfrew nodded.

"You see, you've been out of school too long to take up the work at the high school over at Starnes. Anyway it can't prepare you for college."

"Who wants to go to college?"

Scotty was mentally occupied with the death of all adventure. Renfrew had freed him from a bitter bondage when he took him out of the hands of Lyfe, who had treated him like a farm animal, and in all his orphan life Scotty had not known such a devoted friendship as Renfrew gave him. Also, Renfrew had that singular quality which made him seem the very spirit of adventure, the embodiment of all free, brave, daring things which boyhood loves. As Renfrew's ward Scotty lived in that world of fine adventure, riding the range with this scarlet-clad companion at his side. With Renfrew he had run murderers to earth; with Renfrew he had ridden night rides in the invigorating prairie air; with Renfrew he kept the post of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police at Sagrinay. And now he was to be exiled and shut off from it all; sent like a little boy, unwillingly, to school. He bit his lip, feeling as though everything joyful had been swept out of his brief sojourn in the sunlight. Renfrew pressed one hand upon his shoulder.

"Sit down," he said, gently. Scotty subsided in a chair beside the desk.

"I said it was a job I had for you," he explained. "That's

what it is, a job. A work to be done; an end achieved; something to be accomplished."

"I could accomplish more by making my own living right here," protested Scotty. "What good is college going to do a fellow who's going to live his life out here on the prairie?"

"You're not," said Renfrew. "And anyway that isn't the question. The question is what good you're going to do the world. The kind of a job that makes your living isn't the only job that's worth having by a long shot. You aren't worth the skin you're covered with as you are now; any more than a colt in a pasture is worth his hide. Of course, if you train the colt rigidly you can make a good draught horse of it. If you get the same sort of training, you could make yourself just about as useful. But I'm betting that you've got the makings of a man in you that can use the money which you'll have to the advantage of more people than yourself. We can't all be great men, but we can use the raw material God gave us to make ourselves as great as possible. If you hang about here, Scotty, you'll be chucking the best part of your raw material into the ash heap, and that's the worst sort of shiftlessness."

Renfrew's voice warmed up as he spoke, and Scotty found himself sitting erect in his chair, staring into the eyes of his friend.

"What raw material do you mean?" he asked.

"Money, to begin with," said Renfrew. "Your father dug it out of the ground and died to get it for you. Money. That means that all the wisdom and knowledge and beauty of the entire life of mankind is at your disposal. You can feed your mind and your soul with it. You can train your mind to use it. You can make yourself into the finest man that the stuff that's in you can be made. That's the raw material you've got, and you've got to go to college to make the best use of it. You can't prepare for college without



going to the best kind of school in America, because you're way behind in school work. So you've got to go to school. See?"

If Scotty saw, he saw it written on the wall directly back of Renfrew's neck, for upon that wall he stared darkly, woefully.

"I mean you've got to want to go," said Renfrew, smiling. Scotty grinned, too.

"It's like going to jail," he said. "Life's so adventurous out here."

"But adventure is only play unless it accomplishes something in the making of a man," said Renfrew; and he frowned, wondering what adventure was making of him. "The achievement of great accomplishments through things that are hard to do; those are the big adventures. Men go soft on the range just as they go soft in the cities if they don't get an occasional dose of things that they don't like. You've got manhood in you, Scotty, just the same as dough's got the making of good bread in it. Make yourself into the finest product possible. That's the only real manhood there is; that's the only real job. Making a living is just the bread and butter of existence."

Scotty turned on him with a delighted grin.

"There's a pretty good joke in that," he said, and his eyes sparkled with humor.

"Steady on, young feller, I'm deadly serious." Renfrew was grinning too. He liked to see Scotty smile.

"Something about making my dough into a first class loafer," said Scotty. "Then, suddenly serious: "Isn't there any way I could prepare for college without going to jail?"

"None that I know of."

"Tutors. Some fellows have tutors—"

Renfrew shook his head.

"Too easy. It's no use, Scotty, pleasure has got to be

earned. If you can earn yourself the pleasure of having a tutor, go ahead. That's the only way I know."

"You mean earn the money to pay one?"

"You couldn't. It would need thirty dollars a week, and his fare."

Scotty wrapt himself in resignation.

"It looks pretty hopeless, doesn't it?"

"It depends on what you mean by hope. If I were you I'd hope to find school life as interesting and as adventurous as your life is here. In that light, it looks pretty hopeful, because a man always gets fairly close to what he hopes for."

Scotty stood up and, in his mind, confronted himself.

"That sounds right," he admitted. "You're always pretty right, Doug. I guess probably I'll see it the same way as you do in the morning." And without another word he left the orderly room, where Renfrew continued to sit until late into the night. He wondered what view he would have taken of the matter if he had been in the shoes of Scotty McLeod.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE WRONGNESS OF MR. WRIGHT

**I**N the morning Scotty didn't have an opportunity to talk with Renfrew further, because duty called the Mounted Policeman away before the sun was up, and he had scarcely time to explain his departure to the boy before he was in the saddle and on his way. Scotty, left alone, examined the school catalogues for himself. He found after studying them a while that there was a certain fascination to the life which was pictured in them; there was something desirable about the world of boys with which they dealt. Scotty found himself dreaming of what he might achieve in these strange surroundings; what kind of creature the strange boys who filled these schools might be. They certainly seemed to have queer ideas about games. They seemed to treat them as seriously as a bunch of little kids. Scotty thought that was childish. . . .

He was roused from his reverie by the shrill honking of a klaxon in the street outside. He went to the window, and, almost immediately, to the door. It was Dick Ranney, at the wheel of the automobile which had come to the Scratch Rock Farm when Dick's mother and father moved in.

"Come on," yelled Dick. "Mother wants you and Mr. Renfrew to come out to dinner. I'll run you out now and Mr. Renfrew can come later."

"He's away!" cried Scotty.

"Leave a note for him, and come on. I'm in a raving hurry." He made the klaxon shriek to emphasize his point.

"All right," laughed Scotty. The gay, carefree manner of

this tall, handsome boy always filled him with a feeling that brought laughter. "Just wait till I scribble a note. What time do you want him?"

"Seven o'clock dinner," announced Dick. "I'll honk the horn until you come out. Then you won't forget to hurry." And he did. He made the horn howl dolefully over the prairie until Scotty came running from the house, begging him to shut it off.

"All right," grinned Dick; and he made the car whirl down the main street with intoxicating speed and grace. At the four corners a young man dashed out from the general store and waved his hands wildly. Dick had to stop to avoid running the young man down.

"What's the matter?" he asked coolly. "Want to know the time?"

The young man gazed at him with eyes that seemed to burn with a strange intensity.

"Are you Mr. Ranney?" he asked.

"The same," smiled Dick.

"My name's Crystal," said the young man.

"Meet Mr. McLeod," said Dick. "My friend, Mr. Crystal," he explained to Scotty. The young man nodded quickly.

"Your mother, Mrs. Ranney, collects etchings, does she not?" he asked.

"Correct," said Dick. "She's got a dandy set of Camerons, and a Whistler that would knock your eye out."

"Will you take me out to see her?" asked the young man eagerly.

"Express service," said Dick, opening the door of the tonneau. "No stops till we reach Scratch Rock Farm." And no sooner was the young man inside than Dick did something with the gears and throttle that made the car leap forward like a startled, living thing. They whirled out to Scratch Rock Farm with breath-taking speed, while the intense young

man bounced about in the tonneau without a word in explanation of his unceremonious self-introduction.

"I've got somebody out at the place I want you to meet," Dick told Scotty as they whirled along. "You've got to tell me how you like him."

"All right," said Scotty. "What is he, another horse?"

Dick grinned, remembering the mad bay mare which Scotty had showed him could be tamed.

"No," he said. "It's a tutor. You know I've got to live out here for my lungs, and I've got to have a tutor."

"A tutor!" cried Scotty, his face turning red as a rose. "You say you've got a tutor?"

"That's it. A tutor. But I think he's a washout. We got him through an advertisement from Winnipeg. I want you to tell me— Here we are!"

With great precision, he whisked the car into the new driveway which was not the least of the transformations which had been worked on Scratch Rock Farm by the Ranneys, and drew it up, throbbing, at the front doorway.

Mrs. Ranney came to the door to greet them. She was tall and beautiful. Scotty, who had met her several times before this, was still shy, for although Margery Ranney possessed the power of making every one who met her feel at ease, Scotty had from the first meeting come to adore her; he who had known no mother, and had never met a lady so beautiful in mind and bearing, so graceful in every move she made, always felt when he spoke with her as though he were in a dream and speaking to such a princess as belongs only to dreams.

She seemed now to be so genuinely glad to see Scotty again and see her son return with the healthful glow which the prairie air had brought to his cheeks, that all of them quite forgot about the intense young man. He called their at-

tention to himself with a slight cough. Mrs. Ranney turned brightly to him.

"Oh, yes," grinned Dick apologetically. "This is Mr. Christopher."

"Crystal," said the young man. "I've come all the way from Edmonton, Mrs. Ranney, in hopes that you would let me see your etchings. There are so few collections in this part of the world."

Scotty and Dick had retired into the house as soon as they had achieved the introduction of Mr. Crystal, but they were still within earshot, and Dick caught Scotty's arm in his big hand.

"That's a lie," he whispered. "He came in from Winnipeg. Saunders drove him up from the train, he told me so this morning."

"Why should he lie about it, though?" asked Scotty.

"Don't know. He's probably a swindler, or something. Leave him to mother if he is. Poor wretch."

They had passed from the hall into the long room which had been the dining room and kitchen of the original farm but which was now, with its partitions knocked out, a huge, gray-walled space lighted by long windows.

"Here he is," whispered Dick, as they entered; and almost immediately a man sprang up from the table in a distant corner and looked at the two boys as though startled.

"This is Mr. Wright," said Dick. "My friend, Scotty McLeod, Mr. Wright." And Scotty found himself gazing into a pair of very sharp blue eyes which were set amazingly close to either side of a long, thin nose.

"Mr. Wright is the tutor," explained Dick. But Scotty hardly heard him, for he had glanced from Mr. Wright's face to the table, whither Mr. Wright's sharp eyes had wandered, and on the table Scotty saw an article which seemed grotesquely out of place in that calm room. It was the



cartridge of a thirty-five caliber revolver. He looked immediately away from the table and saw that Dick had noticed his surprise.

"I suppose you'll prepare Dick for college?" he said quickly; and as Mr. Wright looked back at him, Scotty saw him slide his hand lightly across his hip. Scotty felt that he must get away from the man or burst.

"You'll have to show me those horses," he said to Dick.

"What horses?" asked Dick.

"The new ones," said Scotty desperately.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Dick, reading the message in his friend's eyes. "Come on. You'll excuse us Mr. Wright, won't you?"

Mr. Wright smiled absently.

"Surely," he said. And Scotty, out of the tail of his eye, saw him slide over to that table just as soon as the boys turned away. At the other end of the room Mrs. Ranney and Crystal were entering. Scotty wondered if either of them saw Mr. Wright pick up that cartridge.

"Well, what do you think of him?" asked Dick as soon as they got away from the house.

"He's got a gun in his pocket," said Scotty. "And it's loaded."

Dick stared down at him, open-eyed.

"No!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Scotty. "He had just been filling it when we came in. He left a cartridge on the table, and I saw him pat the gun on his hip."

Dick was grinning now.

"Good old Sherlock Holmes," he said. "I thought it was something like that. And he couldn't show any references. Said they'd have to come from Boston." Smiling broadly, he went into his breast pocket and brought forth a folded paper. "Look here," he said.

## *RENFREW RIDES AGAIN*

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Scotty read the paper. It was the usual police notice describing a man wanted for forgery. The description in a general way fitted Mr. Wright.

"See?" cried Dick. "About thirty years old, five foot eleven, blue eyes, thin nose, everything. That's him, all right. And he's a cool hand, too. How could a man hide better than as a tutor in a private family, especially away out here in the prairie."

Scotty was examining the notice with dancing eyes.

"But, Dick!" he cried. "This is the man that Renfrew's after. He was traced to Starnes, and Renfrew went down this morning to look for him. It's ten to one he'll come here to-night and walk right into him."

"Fine!" said Dick. "Couldn't be better."

"But he's armed!" cried Scotty. "That means a gun fight."

"Sure as shootin'!"

"We've got to get that gun, Dick. We've got to."

"Lord, yes. Renfrew'd walk right into the muzzle of it. Come on back to the house!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### TWO OF A KIND

THEY hurried back, and Scotty fought down, as he hurried a desire to forcibly attack the unsuspecting Mr. Wright and take from him the gun which menaced Renfrew's life. They dashed into the long room through one of the French windows, and came face to face with Mr. Crystal who was staring at the wall beside the window while Mrs. Ranney stood behind him, and Mr. Wright, beside her, held an open portfolio filled with etchings.

"That's a Lumsden," Mrs. Ranney was explaining. "Do you know his etching of Winter Morning on the Moors?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Crystal.

"Or is it Benson's?" asked Mrs. Ranney innocently.

"Eh?" cried Mr. Crystal, swinging toward her. "Benson's?"

"Yes, didn't Benson do an etching called Winter Morning on the Moors?"

"NO," said Mr. Wright, unexpectedly. "Winter Morning on the Moors is by Leonard Squirrel."

Mr. Crystal turned on him with his burning intensity.

"How do you know?" he cried.

"It happens to be the top etching of these I hold in my hand," said Wright.

"You don't seem to know a great deal about etchings, Mr. Crystal," murmured Mrs. Ranney, smiling. Then she turned to Scotty, leaving Wright and Crystal to glare at each other angrily.

"When are we to expect Mr. Renfrew, Scotty?"

Crystal turned his somber eyes on Scotty as the boy answered.

"Not till late, I'm afraid. He's gone down to Starnes on duty."

Dick, his eyes shining, was watching Wright intently.

"He's gone to trace a man who's wanted by the police, mother! A forger named Marbry!"

But it was Mr. Crystal who started.

"Wanted by the police?" he asked; and his voice was queerly tense. "Who is this Mr. Renfrew?"

Mrs. Ranney gazed at him calmly.

"The Mounted Policeman of this post," she said.

"Do you think he'll get him?" Crystal asked the question of all of them, but it was Scotty who answered.

"I know he will," said Scotty. "Renfrew always gets his man."

There was a little pause.

"He'd better be careful," said Crystal, then; and his voice was very calm, very quiet. "This man, Marbry, is a dangerous character."

"You mean he'll fight?" queried Dick, and his eyes were still on Wright, who had fallen to a calm study of the etchings in his hands.

"I know he'll fight!" cried Crystal sharply. "Put yourself in his place. It's thirty years in prison if he's caught. If I were in his boots I'd never be taken alive!"

Wright looked up sharply, his keen blue eyes like those of an eagle seemed to pounce upon the speaker; and they all looked fixedly upon Mr. Crystal.

"I think we'd better go and get ready for luncheon," said Mrs. Ranney quietly. "Dick, you take care of Scotty, dear." And she led the way to the door.

The two young men fell in behind her, leaving the two boys together. Dick would have followed the others, but

Scotty stood as though transfixed, with his eyes upon the retreating form of Mr. Crystal until that young man vanished through the doorway.

"Come on, old sportsman," urged Dick.

"Dick," whispered Scotty; and his eyes were very wide. "That Mr. Crystal; as sure as I'm standing here, he's got a gun in his pocket, too! It's under his arm! His breast pocket!"

Dick, from his magnificent height stared down on the other boy.

"My word!" he said. It was his tribute to the fact which had not until now dawned on him; the fact that as far as the description in the police notice was concerned, Mr. Wright and Mr. Crystal, while they bore not the slightest resemblance to each other, might have been one and the same man.

"Long thin nose, blue eyes, five foot eleven, and thirty years old."

"My Gosh, Scotty, we must be seeing double,"

## CHAPTER XX

### TWO GUNMEN

THE boys were silent during luncheon, but they observed every movement and marked every word of the two young men whom Mrs. Ranney kept constantly involved in her brilliant stream of conversation. Scotty was divided between moments when he was lost in admiration of that beautiful lady's deft handling of a difficult situation, and moments when he was desperately striving to invent a means of disarming those two men who sat on either side of him. It was plain to Scotty that at least one of these men was the forger, Marbry, and that both of them had a deep and desperate aversion to meeting Renfrew; that had been evident to Scotty in their separate reactions to the mention of the Mounted Policeman's coming. Both were intense and reckless men, and both of them carried guns—and Renfrew was coming, all unprepared, to meet them.

Mrs. Ranney's situation in the meantime became every moment more difficult. Wright and Crystal failed completely to conceal a deadly antipathy which seemed to develop fast between them; and she had every proof that Crystal was in her house under false pretensions. Why he was there, she had no idea; no doubt his coming was in some way connected with the antipathy that Wright displayed toward him.

"I suppose you will want to return to Starnes as soon as possible, Mr. Crystal?" she said.

Crystal frowned, obviously disconcerted.

"I had thought you might be willing to part with some of



those etchings," he said lamely. "I had hoped to add to my collection from yours."

"But I could hardly take advantage of you," she said, smiling. "You seem to have had so little experience, Mr. Crystal."

"Aw, why don't you run along?" said Wright suddenly.

They all looked at him. His tone had in it the tang of something foreign to the atmosphere in which he spoke.

"I mean, you'll never get away if you don't catch that evening train," explained Wright quickly.

"Mr. Crystal is probably the best judge of what train he wishes to catch," murmured Mrs. Ranney; but Crystal did not cease to gaze at Wright with the most embarrassing intensity.

Wright's sharp eyes caught Crystal's for an instant, wandered to Scotty, and then dropped to the tablecloth. He emptied his coffee cup with a sudden gesture of haste and turned to Mrs. Ranney.

"Will you excuse me?" he asked. "I've got lots of work to do." And he arose from the table.

Mrs. Ranney nodded her permission and Wright slipped from the room. Scotty noticed that Crystal desired to immediately follow him, and he grinned delightedly at the predicament of the intense young man as he sat beneath Mrs. Ranney's flow of pleasant, gracious conversation, and writhed with impatience. Then Scotty felt Dick kick him under the table.

"Do you mind if Scotty and I leave you and Mr. Crystal alone, mother?" asked Dick. "There are so many things to do."

Mrs. Ranney never betrayed a hint of her own predicament.

"When can you take Mr. Crystal to Starnes?" she asked.

"Not till Paxton gets back with Renfrew," said Dick;

and his eyes hovered triumphantly upon Crystal. "I told him to go down right after lunch, and I heard the car go out just a few minutes ago. Come on, Scotty."

Outside the dining room, Dick chortled with glee.

"Now we've got 'em both stranded here," he exulted. "And I'll tell you what we'll do. These two men are criminals, and Crystal is after Wright, or I miss my guess. One of 'em is Marbry, the forger, and I'll bet Renfrew will be glad to lay hands on both of 'em. Now we've got to get Wright out of the way. I think he'd be most useful tied up in the barn, eh?"

Scotty saw the point immediately.

"Sure," he whispered. "Get him out there on some excuse and then jump him. We've got to be careful of his gun."

"That's the idea," said Dick. "Jump him with care and a good-sized brick. Come on up to his room."

They went upstairs to the bedroom which had been allotted Dick's mysterious tutor and found the door shut. Dick knocked, and receiving no answer, tried the handle of the door. It opened, and no voice protesting, they entered. The room was empty.

"Not here," cried Dick.

"You bet he isn't," said Scotty. "Look!"

He pointed to the bed where, among a chaos of wearing apparel which had obviously been hurriedly flung from the gaping drawers and cupboards, a cardboard box lay with its label upturned to the boys' gaze.

"He's run for it!" cried Dick.

"And taken all his ammunition," added Scotty, for the box had contained cartridges.

"He's a quick thinker," grinned Dick. "He got Paxton to take him down. Wonder what he'll say when he meets Renfrew."

## *TWO GUNMEN*

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"Oh, my Lord!" groaned Scotty, picturing a sudden meeting and guns blazing, with all the chances against the red-coat. "I hope he makes a clean get-away before Renfrew shows up!" he blurted out defiantly. "Now let's get this other gunman!"

## CHAPTER XXI

### FOR VALUE RECEIVED

THEY were very serious as they walked down the stairs, because the menace which hovered about Scotty's absent friend was in their minds; the ugly picture of Renfrew's sudden, unexpected encounter with death was vividly before them. They walked into the long room and found Mr. Crystal standing before the French windows examining the magazine of a thirty-two caliber automatic pistol.

He started when he heard them enter, and his hand glided with the movement of a snake to his breast pocket. The pistol disappeared with the effect of magic.

"What are you doing with that gun?" blurted Dick.

"Putting it in my pocket," sneered Mr. Crystal, and his blue eyes burned defiantly. "Surely I don't have to explain what is in my pockets?"

"If you're carrying it because you're afraid of Wright," said Scotty abruptly, "you can throw it away. Wright's gone."

The effect of this remark upon Mr. Crystal was amazing. He seemed for a moment about to strike Scotty with his clenched fist, but held it poised in mid-air instead; then he looked quickly about the room, like an animal seeking a loop-hole for escape.

"You young fools!" he cried at last. "What have you done with him?"

"That isn't polite," said Dick coolly. "I'm your host. If it comes to that, why shouldn't I demand to know why you

come here gunning for my tutor? Anyway, it's a lie about those etchings. I don't believe you ever saw an etching in your life before."

"You're a young fool!" cried Crystal. "You play about with matters of life and death as if they were child's toys. What have you done with Wright?" He moved suddenly so that he had them in a corner of the room.

"Come on! I mean to know!"

Whether the movement he made with his right hand toward his breast was really a movement toward the gun or not they never knew, because Scotty, who, ever since the events of the Lyfe murder, had been alert in all matters concerning guns, picked up from the table a heavy folio volume of Chaucer's poetry, published in the seventeenth century and bound in contemporary calf, and fetched the ardent Mr. Crystal a neat clip with it upon the side of his head.

Mr. Crystal reeled against a dainty Sheraton table which was not designed to carry the weight of Mr. Crystal. The table collapsed and a lamp, three ash trays, four books and Mr. Crystal went down with it to the floor. This time Mr. Crystal snatched at his gun in deadly earnest, so Dick made a flying tackle for his right arm, and threw all his weight upon it, with the result that he had Mr. Crystal's arm under his chest and the gun, in Mr. Crystal's hand, under one ear. Scotty pounced upon the gun and tried to twist it from the man's hand. Mr. Crystal seemed to lie inert and endeavor to consume them with his eyes, but that was merely for the moment. In another one he had executed a phenomenal twist of his entire body which threw Dick into the crook of his arm and Scotty, who had been prostrate across his legs, to the other side of the room.

Then Crystal did something with his crooked arm which permitted him to rise and leave Dick inert upon the floor. It seemed to Scotty that the man had broken Dick's neck,

and maddened by this, he grabbed a chair and rushed at Mr. Crystal, bent upon murder. Crystal raised the gun. Scotty raised the chair to protect his face and body. Dick leaped from the floor and towering four inches above the man with the gun seized Mr. Crystal's throat from behind. Mr. Crystal fired into the air and made a sharp, inarticulate sound in his throat, whereupon Scotty, dropping the chair, again seized the gun.

The three of them then wrestled silently, Crystal trying in vain to break Dick's hold on his throat, Dick trying in vain to tighten that hold, and Scotty vainly striving to wrest the gun from Crystal's hand.

Mrs. Ranney, startled by the shot, had come into the room. She hurried forward and seized Dick's shoulder.

"Let go!" she cried.

"Get out, mother!" cried Dick, distressed.

"Have you all gone mad?" she cried; and Scotty saw that the room was full of people. Servants, who had come in at the sound of the shot. Scotty hung grimly to the gun.

"Hit him with something, mother!" gasped Dick. "He's dangerous!"

The French windows swung open with a crash, and Renfrew appeared, a brilliant splash of scarlet in the long, light room. Dick's father was at his heels.

"Drop that gun!" cried Renfrew, and came forward with a grin.

Scotty felt the gun loosen from Mr. Crystal's grasp. It dropped to the floor, and Scotty changed his grip to Mr. Crystal's arm. Dick seized the other arm, and Crystal stood there, confronting Renfrew with his face set in a tense and burning fury of chagrin.

"Hello, Bliss," smiled Renfrew, lightly. "Whom do you want me to arrest?"

Mr. Crystal gazed at him with extraordinary bitterness.



"If it wasn't for these confounded young puppies I'd have had the catch of the season for you!" he snarled.

"Surely you haven't discovered that Mr. Ranney is a fugitive from justice? Or is it Mrs. Ranney?" Renfrew asked.

"Don't play the fool," said Crystal. "It's Marbry, the forger."

"Come, Renfrew, what's all the mystery?" demanded Mr. Ranney. He was a tall, hard-bitten, energetic man, with a manner which had done as much as his genius toward building bridges and railroads and highways over half the earth.

He was not to be denied.

"Of course," said Renfrew. He indicated Mr. Crystal. "Meet my friend Mr. Christopher Bliss, star reporter and general manager of the *Winnimac Herald*. Mr. Bliss is the most persistent amateur detective in the Northwest."

Mrs. Ranney laughed as she saw the light. The amateur detective composed himself to a new dignity.

"I'm afraid I must appear somewhat ridiculous," he said. "But the fact is that I discovered last Tuesday that Marbry, the forger, had obtained a situation as tutor here through an advertisement in the Winnipeg papers. So I followed him up. You can smile like a collar advertisement from now till doomsday, Renfrew, at the idea of my running him down without the coöperation of your precious police, but the fact remains that I did run him down, and I'd have got him, too, if these fool youngsters hadn't given him the warning."

"We didn't warn him!" cried Dick. "He got away because you let him find you out. Anyway, why did you pull a gun on us?"

"I didn't," said Bliss, very seriously. "I wanted to get the darned thing out of the way when you jumped on me, for fear it would go off."

But Renfrew had become suddenly cold and businesslike.

"Marbry!" he said. "Where is he?"

"He went down with Paxton," said Scotty. "You can depend on it, he took the four-fourty-three from Starnes."

Renfrew had already turned to the windows again, and Scotty ran to his side.

"Be careful, Doug!" he cried. "He's armed. He'll fight."

Renfrew smiled down upon him.

"Thanks, old man. I'll take care," he said.

"Thay!" boomed a deep voice in the doorway. "Doth thith guy belong here?"

They all turned to that commanding bellow and saw in the doorway Paxton, the man who lisped, and, trussed like a bundle of faggots, Marbry, alias Wright, on the floor beside him.

"No," said Renfrew. "He belongs in jail, but I'll take care of him."

He strode the length of the room, and with the help of Mr. Ranney and the burly Paxton, he divested Marby of his pinions and snapped on a pair of handcuffs in their place.

"How did you manage to get him?" asked Dick, proudly gazing on the ugly, squat form of the man who lisped.

"He athked me to drive him to Thtarneth," said Paxton. "But when he heard I was going to get Mithter Renfrew, he changed hith mind and told me to drive him to Burgen; but that wath too far, and I told him I couldn't. Tho he drew a gun, but that didn't make it any nearer, tho I threw him out of the car and took the gun away from him and tied him up. Then I came back here." He said all this very slowly and very thoughtfully.

"Good man," said Renfrew. He turned to Bliss. "Between you and Paxton," he said, "we seem to have a good auxiliary police force."

"And Scotty," cried Dick. "That kid's a real detective. He discovered that Wright and Christopher here, had guns

with 'em, before he'd seen either of them more than ten minutes."

Which turned all eyes on the embarrassed Scotty. Mr. Ranney gazed at him with especial interest.

"You're the man who made Dick's devil of a bay mare eat out of his hand, aren't you?" he said.

"Well, it's just that I understand what horses need," said Scotty, blushing.

"I'm mighty glad to meet you," said Mr. Ranney. "We're going to raise horses here, and you're just the man we want. Will you take a job with us?"

Scotty looked up quickly, his eyes alight with pleasure. Then he remembered.

"Why, no, I'm afraid I can't," he said.

"Why not?"

"I've got to prepare for college. I've got to go to school." Scotty desperately tried to make his voice steady, but he failed.

Mr. Ranney laughed.

"Bless you!" he cried. "That's luck. Dick's got to prepare for college, too, and we're getting a tutor to do the trick for him. You come here and use the same tutor. We want you to. It'll make it better for Dick. Competition—best thing in the world. Will you do it?"

"Of course he will," said Renfrew. He grinned broadly at Scotty. "That's what I mean by earning it," he said. "Giving a bigger value than you get."

Mrs. Ranney put an arm on Scotty's shoulder. She did it in the most graceful manner possible.

"Of course he will be a bigger value," she said.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE ESCAPE OF BARTO

**I**T was, on the whole, a fortunate thing that Scotty's future was so well decided by his winning the place he did in the Ranney home, for two days after Mr. Bliss had suffered the humiliation of seeing Paxton make the arrest which he had planned to bring about himself, Renfrew was ordered to Edmonton upon a duty which was to take him away from Sagrinay for many weeks. He was not yet through with Barto.

The black man had been taken to Fort Saskatchewan near Edmonton where he had been incarcerated until Scotty McLeod and Dick Ranney succeeded in bringing about the capture of Murdock. It was then decided by the powers that controlled such things to take Barto to Regina and put him on trial there with the grocer, Murdock. As the officer who made the arrest, Renfrew was sent for to assist Corporal Agnew, in the duty of escorting the prisoner from Fort Saskatchewan to Regina, while Deming took Renfrew's place at the post at Sagrinay.

Now Barto was a man of known strength. He was a giant in size, standing nearly seven feet in his shoes and weighing some two hundred and forty pounds of bone and muscle. Also, in his veins ran the blood of Aztec Indians and native African chieftains, neither of which types are considered by white men generally to be magnanimous. Therefore Renfrew and Agnew took precautions.

The vehicle in which they planned to transport their prisoner to Edmonton was a police buckboard of a regula-

tion design. This conveyance was drawn by two horses and was provided with two seats. In the front seat sat a constable named Shea, who held the reins and would return to the fort with the buckboard; Renfrew sat at his left and Agnew, with the prisoner, sat behind them. Barto was shackled with a pair of manacles binding his hands wrist to wrist and another pair of manacles which linked his right wrist to the left wrist of Corporal Agnew. Both Corporal Agnew and Renfrew carried their revolvers with the holsters unbuttoned, ready for instant use. Thus they set out from Fort Saskatchewan, and they took a road which gave them the North Saskatchewan River on their right and the open prairie on their left.

Barto sat beside his captor with an impassive face and preserved a deathly silence. His great head, framed by the black, long hair of an Indian, betrayed nothing of his negro blood save in its coloring, and as he sat, towering above the three constables, he appeared more like a barbaric chieftain, carried captive by alien invaders, than like a murderer in the hands of the police. There was great dignity in his resigned and pensive bearing; he seemed to be pondering upon unknown grandeurs of the past. As a matter of fact he was considering how best to cheat the death which bounded him about and made his escape from that buckboard problematical.

About four and one half miles above Edmonton the river road descends from the high bank and runs for some rods with the embankment pressing it to within a dozen yards of the water. As the police buckboard rolled down this descent the bank seemed to rise beside it, and the three policemen had the sense of being shut off from the world by that wall of naked earth; enclosed with their prisoner between the river and the clay. Renfrew spoke a word, and Shea whipped up the horses to a gallop. Agnew patted his revolver butt. Barto, however, had experienced that feeling, too, and as it



brought to the redcoats a sense of danger, it brought to him an impulse to act. He acted; and immediately upon his action Renfrew and Agnew became aware that they had made a mistake.

The mistake of Renfrew and Agnew was a natural one; it is found in the secret conviction of every strong man that he could, if given a chance, put up a very respectable fight against any light heavyweight champion. These two didn't entertain any illusions such as that, but they were both strong men, and while Barto was undoubtedly a giant, it had not occurred to either of them—it could not, indeed, have occurred to any man—that the black man could do what he then and there performed.

As the two powerful horses thundered along, the buckboard swayed and bounced behind them. It was this, together with the fact that the steep bank hid them from all chance observers, that Barto made into his advantage. He first leaned heavily toward Agnew, who instinctively pushed against him and reached for his revolver. Then Barto plunged to his feet with a sudden yank at the manacles which chained him to Agnew's wrist, and Agnew, taken off guard, found himself as a child in the grasp of a man. The pressure he had instinctively exerted against Barto's thrust helped in his downfall; he plunged past Barto, clutched vainly for some hold upon the buckboard, and found himself in space.

Barto had merely put all his strength into his two clenched hands and perpetrated upon Agnew the infantile game of Snap-the-Whip. Agnew was hurled out of the speeding buckboard and Barto, of course, went after him. In the landing the unfortunate policeman was underneath, and Renfrew, throwing himself from the conveyance before Shea had abated its mad speed, picked himself up, bruised and breathless, to see Barto on one knee beside the unconscious form of Corporal Agnew.



The black man had one great foot planted upon the manacle at Agnew's wrist and with this purchase was twisting his clenched hands to break the chain. Renfrew drew his revolver and ran toward him. As he did so the chain snapped and Barto snatched at the revolver in Agnew's holster. In this movement he crouched closely over Agnew's body so that Renfrew instinctively dropped the muzzle of his revolver. Then he saw Barto with Agnew's gun in his hand loop his shackled arms about Agnew's body and, hugging it to him as though it were a dummy, leap to his feet. He then moved toward Renfrew, and the gun in his hand glistened in the sunlight. Renfrew didn't notice the gun. He strode forward briskly to meet the grotesque figure of the black giant and his strange burden, and as he strode forward, Barto fired. He must have fired merely for effect because he couldn't pretend to have aimed his gun, but the bullet helped him considerably. It struck the inside horse of Shea's restive team which that constable, still in the buckboard, was endeavoring to quiet, and the team immediately ran away, taking Shea with it.

In such an engagement as this was, men do not speak. Agnew had shouted a warning when Barto made his attack, and Renfrew cried out as he flung himself from the buckboard; Shea had cried something as he pulled in, and Renfrew, when he drew his gun, had certainly snapped out some words of command and warning at Barto. But these were merely cries; short words uttered from the throat, literally barked out in the excitement of the moment without thought of intelligent expression.

Renfrew was amazed, therefore, when, as he continued his brisk approach in the face of Barto's gunfire (for after the first shot, Barto continued his aimless fusillade), Barto, dropping the form of Agnew to the ground, extended the empty revolver toward him and spoke with a strange deliberation.

It was as though the black man considered in that wild moment that nothing was more important than that his every word should be understood. He spoke as if he were dictating a letter.

"Go away," he boomed. "I want you to go away. Quick! I have done enough. I don't want to hurt you."

The words stopped Renfrew in his tracks. They sounded so grotesque that he almost laughed; but the sight of Agnew, who, having become conscious, lay at his comrade's feet and coughed slow coughs which racked his frame with agony, killed the laugh. Renfrew pounced forward, pressed his gun against Barto's side, and seized the revolver which Barto held in his hand. Barto gave out a sound which resembled a lion's roar and moved like lightning. His great hands closed on Renfrew's wrist in a quick snatch and before the constable had time to appreciate the immense strength of his antagonist he was hurled away as Agnew had been hurled from the buckboard. Like a dummy stuffed with rags he sailed through the air, but it was with the impact of a heavy man that he landed among the rocks at the river's edge.

The fall stunned him so that it seemed to him as though he lay for many minutes watching the black man through a fog, incapable of moving. In that state of stupor he saw his revolver pounced upon by the black man, and he saw the black man, with the queer, clumsy movements of a man who is shackled, thrust the gun in his pocket. Then Barto looked swiftly from one redcoat to the other, and, turning, strode down to the water's edge. Here he stood for an instant and stretched his hands out before him. Obviously he was summoning all his strength, so that Renfrew, in his stupor crazily imagined that he could see huge muscles twisting beneath the black man's shirt. Then Barto made a quick, convulsive movement and an instant later flung his arms

## *THE ESCAPE OF BARTO*

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wide out on either side of his body; he had snapped the steel manacles in two. Again he glanced at the redcoats; not triumphantly, but with brooding, melancholy eyes, then he turned once more to the water's edge and plunged forward into the swift river.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### RESOLUTION

**I**T was some seconds after Barto had plunged into the river before Renfrew's mind regained its control of his body. Then he leaped to his feet with an amazing sense of fitness and, ignoring with an iron determination the searing pains which would have told of a twisted ankle and a ligament of his shoulder torn, he stumbled quickly over to Agnew who had by this time crawled to a near-by rock against which he supported himself. Agnew was barely conscious, and the agony delineated in his face, the stifled moans which passed his lips, suggested deathly sickness.

"Can you stick it till Shea gets back?" asked Renfrew.

Agnew spoke in a murmur which came through his tightly clenched teeth, so that Renfrew had to stoop low to hear him.

"Sure," muttered Agnew. "It's my ribs. The devil's smashed them in. He's no man; he's a tiger. Go get him. I'll wait for Shea."

"Good luck," said Renfrew and continuing to ignore the pain of his ankle and the growing pangs of a wrenched shoulder, he stumbled up the bank to make observations. It was his intention to follow Barto.

From the slight elevation of the bank, he saw the head and a shoulder of the black man dealing with the swift waters of the river as Barto had dealt with the police. The current had carried him well down the river, which at this point is swift and turbulent, and Renfrew was satisfied that before reaching the farther bank Barto would be more than a little distressed. Eagerly the constable looked about for a boat, and while he looked he weighed the wisdom of awaiting

Shea's return to procure arms and reinforcement. Then he saw the boat, and decided to use it immediately. Arms and reinforcement could come later. The duty which lay before him, Douglas Renfrew, was obviously to keep Barto in sight until such time as his capture could be effected.

The boat was an old one of the familiar flat-bottomed fishing type. Renfrew hobbled down the river to it and saw immediately that he was doomed to a troublous voyage. The boat was a third full of water and manifestly rotten of timber from stem to gudgeon; but there was a pair of antique oars beside it and there was no other boat to be had; meanwhile Barto was laboring toward certain exhaustion in the current. The combination of circumstances decided Renfrew at once. He turned over the boat with an effort which did nothing to relieve his pain, and then, having rid the boat of most of the water, he shoved off.

This much done, he was appalled and disgusted by an irresistible feeling of faintness. Try as he might to down it, the pain of his foot seared his body like a red-hot iron and a sickness welled up in him which set his head to reeling. Grimly he commanded himself to ply the oars. Barto was well down stream and would surely drift far with the current for every yard he made toward the further bank. Therefore he, Renfrew, must get the boat out into the current. Time enough to play the woman when the boat was well away from the bank. Time enough to faint when he had given himself to the swift waters to carry him after his quarry. Dizzily, desperately, reeling in the crazy, broken seat, Renfrew pulled at the oars and sought to keep the river bank in his stern.

This fight against faintness continued some moments, and beyond the physical pain which numbed his mind was the distress caused him by the crazy actions of the boat. It swung and swerved in a manner which caused the fainting



man infinite pains, extravagant effort, and more strength than his abused body had to command. Suddenly blackness fell upon him, and he succeeded only in desperately trying to save his oars before the faintness felled him to the bottom of the boat.

Renfrew was unconscious for several minutes. When he came to himself again he found himself soaked with water. The rotten boat was leaking badly and he was lying in a pool some three inches deep. He realized his situation immediately and knew that he could do nothing to mend it save continue as fast as possible upon his pursuit of Barto. In this he was handicapped by the twin circumstances that Barto was no longer in sight and that his efforts to save the oars had been only half successful; one of them was gone. Shaking the pain and sickness from his mind, Renfrew picked up the remaining oar, calculated as closely as possible where Barto would probably land if he succeeded in getting across the river, and began to scull with all his strength against the contrary and unabating currents of the stream. While he sculled the water seeped steadily in.

Renfrew had managed to propel his queer craft about half the distance from bank to bank when he observed that the sun was low over the dim hills to the westward, and by this time his boat was nearly full of water. He had already realized that he could not hope to keep the rotten craft afloat, but he decided that, since the chances of his being able to swim any appreciable distance were exceedingly slim, he would keep to the boat so long as it did not actually sink beneath him. Even though it were filled to the water line it would still be of use as a life preserver; and, as a life preserver it would get him to the shore upon which Barto had landed. But with the realization that daylight was limited, and that its limits were nearly reached, another thought came into Renfrew's mind.



"If I stick to this hulk of a boat," he said to himself, "that coon will have the night to cover him before I get to shore."

He scowled painfully at the alternative and then took it. Reluctantly he threw himself from the boat, and winced with pain as his injured ankle struck the gunwale. Then he gritted his teeth and putting pain out of mind once more, he struck out for the shore. He must swim fast, his mind kept telling him; he must swim fast, for the sun was sinking; swim fast, or his man would get away. And yet no power of will or fortitude could still the pain which was red hot in his shoulder, in his ankle, throbbing unceasingly behind his forehead.

He had to fight the current, for it would not do to let it carry him too far below the point which he had judged would be Barto's landing place; he had to fight the pain which urged him to give up all fight and drift, and he had to combat a feeling of sickness, which was exhaustion; and faintness, which was pain and exhaustion combined. Also, the water was cold. Gradually, like the creeping grasp of a discreet but greedy hand, the chill crept through him, permeated him. All these things Renfrew strove to combat with the power of his purpose. He fought them as a man might fight off a crowd of enemies, and he did not admit for an instant that he might lose the fight. . . . He only wished that it was not such a long and dreary distance to the shore; that the water was not so cold, the current so fiercely swift. . . .

It seemed to Renfrew that hours passed before he reached the land; as a matter of fact he was in the water little more than ten minutes. The last few minutes had been a fairly close thing. The chances had been less than even whether Renfrew would make the shore or whether he would remain in the river until his body was taken out. He had grown

tired. He had found himself sinking beneath the surface with arms too tired to uphold him.

"This," he had said to himself, "won't do. I've got to get through with this. I can't let the river take me." And he marshaled again that resolution which had made possible so much as he had done. It gave him strength to reach the shore.

He found himself slipping and stumbling up a muddy beach which was strewn with rocks of many shapes and sizes. Among these rocks he fell, and lay for a moment as though he would not soon move again. But in the inert, water-soaked body, the resolution was not dead.

"I can't rest long," he was saying to himself as he lay there. "I can't give Barto too much of a start. I'll just relax for a minute or two and gather my forces." He grinned to himself. "A man can't be in too fine condition," he thought, "if he's meeting up with a man like this Barto chap."

Then he sat up abruptly. While he had been musing his eyes had wandered eagerly about the beach seeking for signs. He sat up abruptly because he had found one. It was a sign that glittered; something that glittered among the rocks.

Renfrew aroused himself and tried desperately to reach that glittering sign without too obviously betraying the weakness and pain of his condition, for Barto might be observing him from the brush which edged the beach. So Renfrew came to the sign quite slowly, in pain, with great deliberation. He picked it up. It was the wrist piece of a broken manacle, and Renfrew saw that the lock had been shot asunder by more than one revolver bullet. Renfrew grinned at the reflection that Barto was left with not more than four cartridges unexploded.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### QUARRY RUN TO EARTH

THE excitement of his discovery gave Renfrew new life. He felt as though spurred by the knowledge that he was hot upon the trail of the man who had escaped him, and he hobbled down the beach with almost no thought for the pain which burned him.

In a few moments he found what he was looking for—a tiny trail which arose from the beach and entered the thick brush which formed a tangled barrier on the bank. He followed this trail with only impatience for the stabbing hurt which his ankle, bound in wet leather, gave him, and stumbled up the uneven pathway. On top of the bank Renfrew gained a sufficient view of his surroundings to see that he was on a point of wild land which was divided from the main bank of the river by an inlet. He remembered having seen this point before, and the memory brought to his pain-racked face a grimace of disgust. He knew that the marshy way from that point to the mainland promised him an agony of rough going. But Barto had presumably taken that way, and Renfrew was following Barto.

The headland of the point was thickly covered with the tangled brush and a species of stunted tree, akin to the Texas chaparral. The trail, which was old and fairly overgrown by the brush, twisted and rose and fell through this miniature wilderness. It was a hard trail to follow; hard to discern, and woefully hard to the burning, swollen instrument of torture which was Renfrew's ankle. Renfrew covered it with remarkable speed, considering the condition

he was in, and soon found himself at the point where the trail sank to the swampy land which connected the headland with the main bank of the river. Here the going was even harder, and Renfrew's drawn face became more drawn as he was forced to slow his stumbling pace.

Every now and then he would find his feet sinking deeply into mud, and many times the trail took him through marshy places where footing was mud and water. Here and there Renfrew, finding himself ankle deep in the mess, knew he was off the trail with its underfooting of logs which had long since rotted in the slime. He would then flounder about until he found the trail again; and while he floundered the sickness, the faintness, would sweep through him, hold him reeling in its grip, and depart as swiftly as it came. During one of those fainting spells, while he blundered along without knowledge of anything but the necessity for overcoming that weakness, he plunged into a green clearing which gave way horribly beneath his feet.

"Quagmire!" The warning rang in his mind with the blare of a bugle call; and throwing himself backward he tore his body from the grasp of the quicksand by an exertion of strength which left him exhausted at the roots of the tree which had proffered him its grip.

"That was a close one," he grinned to himself. "Don't want any more of those." And he worked gingerly at his wrenched shoulder, having called upon it for more service than a physician would have advised for an uninjured man.

It seemed then as though he heard a voice crying to him. A voice which boomed in the gathering twilight like the reverberation of some forest animal roaring in the wilderness. Renfrew put this down to his general condition, and shut his ears to it.

"Can't afford to give way," he told himself. "Not till I've had a chat with Barto."

But the voice persisted, and Renfrew, after convincing himself that the sound could not be from within himself, arose and followed it. It led him along the trail, and yet, as he proceeded, it seemed to come from beside the trail. And then Renfrew knew that the voice was a cry for help because it had in it the sound of despair. Leaving the trail, Renfrew plunged through the underbrush, scrambling painfully from one footing at the base of a bush to another. Thus he came to such a green clearing as had nearly engulfed him a moment before; thus he came to the voice which cried out in the twilight, and thus he came to Barto, for the voice was his.

The black man was caught by the quagmire. He was engulfed by the slime to a depth above his waist, and his only hold upon life consisted of the slim, wand-like branch of a stunted tree near the quagmire's edge. This wisp of green stuff was too frail to give Barto a purchase by which he could pull himself out of the quicksand, and he grasped it desperately, hopelessly, while his body sank lower and lower. When Renfrew came, Barto had ceased to struggle. The expression with which he greeted the policeman was indescribable.

There was gladness in it, for Renfrew brought to him the dawn of hope; there was amazement and wondering admiration in it, for he had left Renfrew, a broken man, on the other side of the river; and there was a certain nobility of resignation in it, as might appear on the face of a vanquished warrior who, too proud to plead for mercy, places himself in the hands of his enemy.

Renfrew didn't wait, however, to consider the subtleties of Barto's expression. He saw at once the necessary thing to do and immediately did it. He threw himself headlong in the mud, and locked his arms tightly about the slim trunk of the same tree which had offered Barto its slender branch.



## *RENFREW RIDES AGAIN*

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He gripped it close to the ground, near the roots and then wriggled about until his legs were extended toward Barto.

"Grab my feet! Can you?" he cried.

Barto made with his body a mighty heave as he floundered waist deep in the quagmire, and then loosening his hold of the slender branch he hurled himself toward the proffered aid and managed to grasp one of Renfrew's feet. By his hold upon that foot the black man pulled all the weight of his gigantic body out of the slough which held it, and the tendons of Renfrew's arms fairly cracked under the tremendous strain of it. In a moment Barto was beside the red-coat, closely hugging the tree, panting and sweating after his terrible adventure. Renfrew remained on his face, his arms still locked about the tree.

"Get up," said Barto at last. "You've run me down. Get up and take me."

There was a wealth of admiration in his voice, and wonder; but Renfrew did not get up. He did not hear Barto's voice, and he did not answer it, for Barto had thrown his whole weight on Renfrew's torn ankle, and Renfrew had fainted.

There followed as strange a journey as any two men have made, for Barto, after gazing down upon the still form of Renfrew, in its torn and water-soaked uniform, arose, picked up that unconscious figure and balanced it over one huge shoulder. Balancing his burden with infinite care, he arose to his full height and then, smashing through the tangled brush like some lord of the forest, he strode through the dim twilight toward the trail.



## CHAPTER XXV

### THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY

**M**ATTHEW MACARTHUR, who has a homestead on the river trail seven miles above Edmonton and on the other side of the Athabasca, experienced that evening the most remarkable adventure of his life. He was sitting on the porch of his frame house watching the sun sink rapidly, like a flaming balloon, behind the hazy line of a distant western hill. The world was very quiet and the strange, shrill voice of a thousand insects competing with the chatter of a hundred birds was emphasized by the hush which hushed the evening peace. And out of that hush, out of the hazy sunset, came a man.

A gigantic man he was, with a face as black as coal and as hard-set as granite. On his shoulder he carried another man, a redcoat of the Northwest Mounted Police, who was completely unconscious and whose uniform was wet and torn. The black man strode directly to Matthew MacArthur's doorway with this strange burden, and towering above the homesteader, addressed that astonished man in a voice of thunder.

"Open your door!" he cried. "This man is hurt!"

"Surely!" said Matthew, and turning, he threw his door wide open.

The black man passed him by and carried his burden into the dim room. He paused for a moment, baffled by the darkness, then, making out the form of Matthew's cot, he crossed the room and laid his burden down upon the quilt.

"He has been in the river?" inquired Matthew.

The black man gazed upon him somberly for a moment, and when he spoke he did not answer him.

"Get me some food," he demanded.

Completely dominated by the atmosphere of mystery and danger which the black man had brought with him, Mac-Arthur went through to the kitchen and busied himself cutting chunks of bread and cheese, while, in the next room, the black man opened the redcoat's clothing and cut away the water-soaked leather boots. When Barto discovered the swollen, discolored condition of Renfrew's foot a sound escaped his lips and he glanced quickly, guiltily, at Renfrew's face. He found that face gray with an unnatural tint of grayness; he found the features drawn in a mask of fortitude; he found the unyielding gray eyes gazing into his.

"Ah!" he cried. "You are awake! You feel!"

And Renfrew could not for the life of him reply, for to open his lips would have been to betray the agony which he endured. Barto sprang to his feet and gazed down on Renfrew with an expression of mingled defiance and regret.

"It is always like this!" he rumbled moodily. "I didn't want to hurt you. But a man cannot die without an effort; without trying to put it off. And it comes to this. I have hurt you. And that other one. I do not mean to do it."

There was pathos in the sincerity with which he spoke. Renfrew sensed that, and when he responded to the black man's words the pity which that pathos stirred in him overcame the pain which seemed to consume him.

"That is our affair," he said. "We take our chances."

As though under a spell the black man stood silent and stared down at him.

"And now," said Renfrew, "you are under arrest."

The black man's stare became ugly.

"Don't be a fool!" he growled. "You have no power now."

Renfrew made a supreme effort to put into his voice the authority which he knew might sway this giant as potently as force.

"While I am alive," he cried sharply, "I am stronger than you! Surrender quietly, and it will be to your advantage. Resist arrest, and it will count against you. You can't get away from us, Barto. We're sure to get you in the end!"

Barto's eyes glowed defiantly.

"You're broken!" he rumbled. "You're smashed! How can you hold me now?"

Renfrew indicated with a nod the door which led to the kitchen.

"That man must do as I tell him," he said; and he conquered a moan of pain.

To his astonishment Barto fell on one knee beside the cot, so that his great head was close to Renfrew's drawn face.

"No!" cried the black man; and a queer note of pleading was mingled with his unabating defiance. "No! Do not set that man upon me, for I have done enough! I do not want to kill him!"

And Renfrew saw that what the black man feared was something very real. In Barto's dark eyes gleamed the promise of death for whoever tried to hold him; and the chances were all against MacArthur. Renfrew saw this as clearly as though it were written in bright letters for him to read, and he fell back wearily upon the cot as he saw at the same time his only way.

"Good-by, then," he sighed. "We will meet again, Barto, but for the time being we must say good-by."

With wide eyes the black man stood up, and for a moment he stood and gazed, wide-eyed, upon the redcoat. Then:

"You are right," he cried suddenly, so that his voice rang

in the small room. "I am afraid we will meet again. I hope I don't kill you then!"

He stepped forward abruptly and shoved his great hand out over Renfrew's breast, and Renfrew, moved deeply by this extraordinary parting, took that hand and shook it warmly.

"Some day," he said.

"Yes," said Barto.

For an instant his great form stood in the doorway between Renfrew and the sunset. The sunset was very red, so that for that instant the black man seemed poised in an aura of flame. Then he was gone. Renfrew drew a breath sharply between his teeth, and pain flooded through his body like hot fire. MacArthur came into the room at the sound of that drawn breath. He stared at the empty space which Barto had seemed to fill.

"He's gone?" he asked.

Renfrew sank backward, completely done.

"Yes, gone," he sighed. "Gone. . . . Bring me . . . water. . . . For a little while . . . we have said . . . good-by."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### DEMING TELLS A TALE

**W**HEN Scotty, at the Ranney Ranch, heard that Staff Sergeant Deming was taking Renfrew's place while Renfrew was away about the business of delivering John Barto at Regina, he immediately came to Sagrinay to pay the sergeant his respects. Dick Ranney accompanied him.

Deming made them welcome at the Police Post, and asked them to stay the night. A telephone message to the Ranney Ranch fixed that, and the result was that they sat about the fireplace in the evening speaking of Barto's visit to Alaska; the boys trying to picture that giant black man as he had followed the snowy trails and won fame for the ease with which he had done the work of three ordinary men. Deming's short, terse sentences gave them glimpses of scenery as fantastically gigantic as the black man in which to clothe their pictures.

"Do you want to hear a story?" asked the Staff Sergeant suddenly. "For this jabber of trails in Alaska has brought a queer happening into my mind."

He did not have to press them.

"We will not bother about personalities," said Deming. "I could play Renfrew's trick upon you and give you a suitable name for the man this story is about, but I would only forget the name, not having Renfrew's knack for the telling of a story. So I will confess at the outset that the man who had the sweet job of rounding up this Eskimo,



Kahnak, was me meself, or I, or whatever is the proper way of putting it.

"It is not the least of the white man's burden that the force carries it in what we call the Mackenzie River Sub-district which has no northern boundaries for the men who have the luck to be posted on it.

"And in the Mackenzie River Subdistrict is that frothy bit of river which is called Splinter Creek because of no reason at all. Do not mistake me. Splinter Creek may be called a creek on the map, but there is no one-hundred-mile stretch of any river I know save the upper reaches of the Liard, that I would not sooner navigate than this forty miles of what they call creek. It is all white water, you see; and a man makes no more than fifteen miles a day on the up trip if his natives are as good as they come. The rocks cut the soles off your boots, the cold water hugs you around the waist for nine hours a day, and the boat breakage is something pitiful. In the winter you do not approach within a hundred miles of Splinter Creek unless you are not a sane man, or unless it so happens that you have to. Have I told you that Splinter Creek is one of those streams that mark the place where the Mackenzie River goes all to pieces before it reaches the sea? . . . Well, it is.

"This came about to me in November when I was by way of checking up on a colony of the Eskimos which had decided to live in the coast lands to the east of Herschell Island. It was desirable to see that they did not starve to death in that place of slim pickings. I found that they were in no danger, and was returning to the island when who should I run into, all cozy in the shack which he had built for himself before he had rambled away to who knows where a year and a half before, but old Otto Klausmein. Otto lived wherever and however he could in a variety of different ways and different places. But the person who makes this story



was not Otto. Oh, no. Otto was glad to see me, and he made me comfy for the night and all, but the person who makes this story was his wife.

"She sat in a corner of his shack and sewed, this wife did. She sewed in a way that Eskimos sew, and she leaned over her work and muttered in a language which the Eskimos have, for Otto's wife was an Eskimo. She gave me the beginning of this story when I was telling Otto of our plans to make a patrol into the eastern coast country and look into the life of the Eskimos who lived there.

"She spoke up suddenly while I was talking and made noises at me like an old record played on a phonograph with a worn needle.

"What is it she says?' I asked Otto.

"She says you must not go there,' said he.

"And why not?' I asked.

"He passed the question on to the queer little woman, and she answered him.

"You must not go there because Kahnak is among those people,' says Otto. 'They are going to kill any white man who comes near them because Kahnak has killed a white man, and they have heard that it will not be healthy for him to meet another one.'

"Well, this sounded like something in the way of business, and I followed it up very dutifully. Between us Otto and I cross-examined that Eskimo lady in a manner that was scientific. She told us all about it, for it appears that she had no use for Kahnak.

"Kahnak had taken a job with a white man named Polasky the preceding summer. Polasky had heard large tales of the furs which had been gathered by the Eskimos up Splinter Creek, and he was all for risking the hardships of the journey to beat all other traders to the market. But Polasky was no gentleman, and what is more, prohibition to him was just

silly. So he took up the creek with him a vast stock of bad language, and a jug of fire water that would have preserved the three of us in alcohol, and varnished a house as well. He always used the fire water, which he miscalled by the name of whisky, first, and he used the bad language directly afterward.

"It is to the everlasting misfortune of the man, Kahnak, that while Polasky spilled the bad language, it remained with him to spill the whisky. This he did as they unloaded the boat one evening, and since he did it by dropping the stone jug upon hard rock, he also broke the jug. Polasky pounced upon the broken jug and filled the air with lamentations while he poured what was left of the precious fluid into the coffee pot and told Kahnak what he thought of him. He used many names which Kahnak could not understand, and said a great deal which to the simple Eskimo was Greek; but one thing he said was not Greek to Kahnak, for it was said with words which Kahnak had often heard white men use while hunting.

"'Now if you spill *that*!' swore Polasky, as he stowed the coffee pot carefully away in the grub box. 'If you break *that*, say your prayers, because I'll kill you dead as a door nail! Kill you! D'y'understand?' And Kahnak, as I have told you, understood.

"Well, the next morning Kahnak spilled the coffee pot by virtue of the fact that he could not prevent his hand from trembling as he carried that terrible burden. Immediately it clattered to the rocks the wretched Eskimo ran quickly from the camp, and Polasky had to beg him and plead with him to carry on with the journey. You can believe me that Polasky was very mad—a very angry man.

"For three days thereafter Kahnak traveled with Polasky. They fought together the sinful currents of the water; they

made camp, together, they ate their meals together, they slept side by side in the tent or on the bare banks of the stream, and, breaking camp, they followed unceasingly the rocky river course—together. And always Kahnak was waiting for Polasky to try and kill him, for the words which he had understood and would never forget were the words, 'I kill you. Do you understand?'

"At the end of the third day Kahnak had not been killed, and Polasky made his camp at a point on the river bank some miles below the village of Eskimos which he had come to visit. Kahnak dutifully helped him to pitch the tent and to prepare a meal, but after the meal was over the Eskimo drifted away from the camp and did not return.

"Polasky did not like that. He had not ceased to grumble at Kahnak's stupidity in wasting the whisky, and he hadn't made any effort to be decent to the native, but he didn't want to lose him, for a man cannot contemplate with optimism the descent of such a stream as Splinter Creek without help or companionship. So Polasky called into service all his bad language and told the barren spaces which surrounded him what he would have liked to believe was the truth about Kahnak's future in this world and the next.

"While Polasky entertained himself in this way, Kahnak was in consultation with all that he knew of wisdom. He knew that in the village up the river lived Poya-tac who was regarded by many of the Eskimos as a man of superhuman wisdom; and there was also Pugnana, wife of Poya-tac, who was a witch woman, and who could speak on very easy terms with all the important spirits worth knowing. These, reasoned Kahnak, would show him how he could escape the evil intentions of Polasky; and sure enough, Poya-tac and Pugnana told him out of their great wisdom just how it could be done.

## RENFREW RIDES AGAIN

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"'You say that the white man is going to kill you,' said Poya-tac. 'And you do not wish him to kill you.'

"'That is so,' agreed Kahnak. 'I do not wish to be killed.'

"'Then,' said Poya-tac, wisely, 'you must kill him first. Go back to his camp and tell him this. Then shoot him with a gun. Then he will not kill you.'

"This sounded very reasonable to Kahnak and he went down the river to Polasky's camp very happily, for he had not wanted to be killed and this seemed to be a very certain way out of it. Polasky helped him considerably in the execution of Poya-tac's instructions, for directly Kahnak appeared the white man dashed from the tent and pounced upon Kahnak with a volley of curses. So Kahnak did not have time to tell Polasky what his intentions were. He merely picked up Polasky's own rifle and shot the white man in a very decisive manner. Then he shot him again to make sure that Polasky would not suffer pain, for Kahnak, like most Eskimos, was a very kindly soul. Then he wrapped Polasky's body in his sleeping bag and covered it with stones on the river bank, after which he took the outfit with him and joined Poya-tac and the Eskimos of the village."

## CHAPTER XXVII

### HOW DEMING CAME TO TALK WITH KAHNAK

“‘**B**UT,’ said Otto Klausmein’s sewing woman, “this Poya-tac is a bad man. He knows that Kahnak has done a bad thing, and that the men with the red coats will come to get him, and he has taken his people off there to the east and told them that they must treat you all the same way as Kahnak treated that Polasky. That is all.’

“But she did not know how far short of ‘all’ she had told me. She had not told me that an officer of the force can take no native’s word as an indictment of another native, for we cannot tell what they are carrying in their queer, uncivilized hearts. She did not know that her story was little less than a command to me to go off ahunting this Kahnak laddie without regard for the manner of his people’s greeting, and she did not know that before I hunted him out I must have a warrant for his arrest which was established upon some better evidence than she was able to give me. The only evidence I could call upon for this purpose was the evidence which she said Kahnak had left under that pile of stones on the banks of Splinter Creek, and, as I have told you, Splinter Creek is not a waterway a sane man would follow in the winter time unless he had to. But I had to, and I took two natives with me, Angwak and Alecummik; if they had not been good men, I do not think that I would be here now.

“You see there is no food in that country in the winter time. No food, and the wind storms whirl the snow through



the air in interminable blizzard. We carried enough for a six weeks' trip. When we reached the spot where the village had been the previous summer, we had been out three weeks and two days.

"It took us two days more to find the spot where Polasky had camped, and you will bear in mind that Kahnak had made the trip from the spot to the village and back again in one night—a man can use up hours in the winter time conserving the energies of his dogs and men, contending with the wind and the blizzard for every forward step, and nursing hand and foot against the most fatal affliction of northern winter travel—freezing.

"That is why we were slow, and when we found the body and discovered the truth of Otto's interpretation of his wife's story—the body of the wretched man bore the marks of Kahnak's first shot and his kindly shot of last relief—then, we were on half rations. It was only the fine quality of those two children of the snow country that brought us safely back to Herschell Island, and even at that the winter was breaking up before I left the hospital. . . . Oh, yes, I had frozen a foot and I had contracted pneumonia. Between them, Alecummik and Angwak brought me in like a sick child out of the storm.

"That was part one, do you see? We will call it 'Getting the Evidence,' and let it go at that. It was now up to me to journey eastward and get the man. Such journalistic alarms as Mrs. Klausmein had spoken of in the matter of Poya-tac's precautions for keeping the police away, it was up to me to ignore completely. In those days there was not much known of the country east of the Coppermine River, for that was before Stefansson had made it known that a man could wander about in the Arctic as one who likes walking wanders through the farm lands of the South. But we had made a good many patrols such as I had



already planned to the eastward, and with such tried company as my two Eskimos, I thought very little of the journey.

"We came upon Poya-tac and his people in eight days' travel along the coast, and we were glad when we found them, for the early summer sun was oppressively hot, and I do not know that we could have kept up the pace we were making for more than a day or longer. Of course, we should have gone by sea, but the ice was still heavy in the waterways.

"You come upon an Eskimo village as you come upon any encampment in wild places. They are a friendly, hospitable lot, and open the village to you as though they found no greater pleasure in life than to share with the unexpected guest the scanty provisions which they toil unceasingly to procure. The three of us came tramping into this village with our five dogs and eight packs between the lot of us, and we marched in with no hint that we might expect any other greeting than the usual one. In this we were safe enough, for the Eskimo is nothing crude, and he will greet his worst enemy with a smile and give him the best of housing while he grinds the knife with which he plans to stab him.

"Poya-tac played his part splendidly. He was like an actor, I'll say that for him. He was all smiles, and the Eskimo smile is a smile worth traveling far to see. The villagers crowded about us, and Poya-tac stood in the forefront of them, grinning. They took our packs and our dogs, feeding the animals and carrying the packs to a tent which they immediately started cleaning out for us. And all the while I stood there like a graven image, waiting for Angwak to translate to the jolly Poya-tac the message which I had to give him. Poya-tac was short and slight. He had sharp eyes, high cheek bones, yellow complexion and wispy

mustache like the pictures you have seen of a Chinese mandarin. He stood there in his furs and chattered like a squirrel. Angwak couldn't get a word in edgewise.

"‘Say something,’ I yelled finally to Angwak. ‘The man cannot keep up this chatter till dark!’

"‘So Angwak said something. He kept on saying it over and over again, but Poya-tac didn't stop talking.

"‘What is he saying?’ I asked.

"‘That you are the great white lord,’ said Angwak. ‘And that you may have anything which you ask for. He says that his people are poor and have many furs to sell.’

"That gave me an idea, and I told Angwak to tell him that we'd look at the furs after we had rested. Angwak passed the word along and it had a most amazing effect. We were actually hustled by the whole village, men, women and children, into the tent which had been prepared for us. There was something unnatural about the manner in which they crowded about us, making it difficult for us to proceed with dignity, and I felt a wave of excitement sweeping through those natives in a very dangerous way. I said to myself, ‘This would be a fine overture to a murder.’ And I was glad when we got into the tent with the crowd on the outside, myself sitting on the bed platform, my two Eskimos on either side of me, and Poya-tac in the doorway grinning at me.

"Now this tent was not such a tent as you see in the catalogues of camping equipment. It was an affair erected upon a framework of driftwood, with sod walls two and a half feet from the ground and a roof and walls of skins stretched neatly over the sturdy framework. As I sat on that bed platform and spoke with Poya-tac, I could hear the villagers crowding about the outside of the walls, and I could hear them crawling up on the framework, pressing their ears to the skins of the roof. Then I knew that

Poya-tac's talk of fur trading was trickery, that he, and all this chattering crew knew what I had come for. But of course it wouldn't do to tell them that I knew.

"Still, I wasn't going to let the matter continue in doubt. It is a great mistake for a white man to try the native game. Our strongest weapon against such devious methods as Poya-tac was using, is the direct, straightforward attack upon the subject which shows no fear. So I told Angwak to tell Poya-tac that we had come for Kahnak, and Angwak told him again and again; but do you know that astonishing little mandarin just stood there and chattered as if Angwak hadn't even spoken.

"'What is he talking about?' I cried, jumping to my feet.

"'Furs,' said Angwak. 'He says that he knows you are a very rich man, and will not take advantage of him.'

"'I have not come for furs!' I bellowed to Poya-tac. 'I have come for Kahnak! Kahnak! I wish to speak with him! With Kahnak!'

"And my voice, raised in a thundering bellow that made the tent shake, had the effect of producing a startling silence. Poya-tac stopped his chatter and stared at me very gravely as though puzzled, and the Eskimos all about the house were very still. Angwak interpreted my remarks to Poya-tac, and Poya-tac answered him.

"'He says he knows no man by the name of Kahnak,' Angwak said.

"At that I stripped off my coat so that the scarlet would do its work upon their color-loving minds, and strode out passed Poya-tac with great dignity. I passed out of the tent with Angwak and Alecummik at my heels, and left Poya-tac to follow. Outside the tent I turned immediately toward it, and found the village piled up in a regular stack of humanity which covered the walls and the roof. They

all stared down upon me and my uniform with great wonder and admiration. I talked to them.

"'I have come to talk with a man named Kahnak,' I said. 'There is a great White Father in a distant city built of stone, who wishes you to be happy and contented. But no good will come to the people if there is one among them who kills men without cause. If he has good cause, if he kills to save his own life, the great White Father will understand, and forgive him, but the great White Father wishes to speak with every man who kills another so that he can protect all his people from evil doers. That is why I am here. I am here to take Kahnak to a place where he can tell the servants of the great White Father why he killed a certain white man named Polasky; and if Kahnak does not come with me and do this, then many of you must come. Who then, will do your winter hunting and your summer fishing?'

"And they listened very dutifully while Angwak translated my words.

"Poya-tac answered me immediately.

"'No Kahnak! No Kahnak!' he chattered. But I held up one arm, very majestic, and he stopped.

"'For two days,' I announced, 'I shall live here in this tent. That is the time I will give you to bring Kahnak to talk with me!' And in fine dignity I turned and walked into the tent while Angwak was telling them what I'd said. After Angwak and Alecummik had followed me into the tent, we dropped the flap of skin which was the door, and sat there listening to the colossal chatter which burst forth outside."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### AND HOW THE TALK WAS POSTPONED

“**Y**OU will be thinking that my position was not a pleasant one, or perhaps you are among those to whom a man must be hideously fierce on the face of him before he impresses you as dangerous. Most stories of hair-raising adventure are established upon the old idea of the bogey man. Indians are very dangerous and falling captive to them makes your blood crawl because Indians paint their faces and make terrible mugs when they dance. Jungle Africans are fine people to make into adventure stories because they not only are famous for killing people in horrible ways but they are terribly ugly. Of course the most thrilling villain of the lot is the gorilla.

“Now in the Arctic we haven’t got any atmosphere at all to thrill you with. The land appears bleak and barren, to be sure, and I can promise you that you’d draw pretty close together if you ever found yourself out on the sea ice with the aurora borealis crackling over your head. But there are no loathsome reptiles there, there aren’t any dangerous animals to speak of except the polar bear which you can generally scare away with an empty tomato can, and the natives are the most genial, grinning, good-natured little people in the world. I have never seen a really fierce-looking Eskimo. The most villainous of them have the appearance of somehow meaning well, and they are honest as the day is long.

“But the point, me lads, is this: if you are going to be killed it doesn’t much matter whether you are killed in a



spirit of genial good humor or of hideous ferocity; you don't like being killed. And the disturbing fact about the Eskimos is, that they don't have to be worked up into a frenzy to do the killing. Once they have made up their minds that a killing is a desirable and necessary thing they are quite capable of approaching you with a regretful frown and running a few spears through you for no greater reason than, let us say, that the number of poor hunters must be reduced to make full rations possible for the whole village. They will put an orphan child out of the way as an act of kindness, and they will strangle an elderly cripple to relieve him of an undesirable sort of life. And we sat there, surrounded by a mob of Eskimos who seemed to be amiably debating when and how we should be killed. There seemed to be no doubt among them as to whether such a killing was desirable or not, it was merely a matter of when and how. It was a very difficult situation.

"Angwak arose suddenly from the place where he squatted near the door. 'I go out!' he said. 'I hear their talk.' And the brave fellow calmly walked out into the chattering mob.

"The rattle of their voices continued after he had gone, rising and falling as more or less of them became more or less excited. Then it seemed to recede, moving away from the tent like an ebbing wave of sound. It broke in the distance into scattered conversations, and finally it fell away into comparative peacefulness. I still sat there in the tent. You see I had said that I would stay at home, so to speak, until they brought me my man, and I didn't consider it good for the prestige of the force to show undue anxiety. So I sat there and strained my ears for any sound that might indicate Angwak was in trouble.

"It relieved my mind greatly, I may tell you, when the fine fellow came back again as I prepared our dinner and told



me that the tactics I had used had turned the tables against our genial enemy, Mr. Poya-tac.

“The people do believe you, Chif,” said he. And I do not mean to brag when I tell you that by ‘Chif’ he meant Chief, a word he was very proud of as being one which a white man might use to his boss. ‘They do believe you, and they have told Poya-tac that he must turn Kahnak over to you or that they will make him come to you themselves.’ Which was such good news that I decided we would celebrate it with a mess of beans, boiled in seal fat.

“Alecummik and Angwak sat and joked together in a way which Eskimos have as I prepared the luxurious dish. It was strange fare to them and they left the concoction of it entirely to me. I first had Alecummik scrape the oil lamp which was in the tent, and I should tell you that an Eskimo oil lamp is a sort of semi-circular dish hollowed out of stone with a rim around it some inch and a half deep. Angwak arranged the wick, which is a felt of thistledown, plucked wool, or cotton if the material is at hand, and I took out a skin full of seal fat which I had been carrying and filled the lamp.

“The three of us were busy getting the thing lighted and wondering whether it would not be better to leave the tent and seek a fire of driftwood, when the flap of the tent was pulled aside and an Eskimo stood there looking at us.

“Pretending to a proper pride in such surroundings, I did no more than glance up and nod a welcome to the visitor, feeling that if it were Kahnak, we need not feel over-anxious in our greeting. But it was not Kahnak.

“It was a woman with a keen, dark face who stood there, and since I made no motion to challenge her, she just stood silent and watched us until we had the tricky, smelly contraption well alight and burning briskly. She still stood there, and still kept her silence while we rigged a pan above

the flame and put the beans over the fire. Then, having let us get so far, she spoke, and I will say that I jumped with surprise at the sound of her voice. It was not the light, flat voice of most Eskimo women. It was deep, like the voices of such women as sing second parts in the church choirs you have heard. And I won't bother about translating what she said for you, but tell it just as though I did not receive it through the mouth of Angwak.

"'You cook with seal fat!' she said, and her voice was the same as if she had said, 'You have murdered my only child!'

"'Yes,' said Angwak. 'Seal fat.'

"At that she let out a whoop of rage and distress.

"'You have done it!' she cried. 'You have done it, now! You have slain all the tribe. You have displeased the spirit of the fishes. They will not run, and we will starve!' And she dashed away from our tent wailing out the bad news to all the village who greeted this new excitement by a new gust of chatter. I stood up, all aghast and demanded of Angwak what form of madness possessed the woman. To my dismay, Angwak and Alecummick were staring at me with black fear in their faces.

"'Chif,' said Angwak. 'This is worse than death, for it is a death we have brought upon ourselves.'

"'Good lord!' cried I. 'Are you daft, as well? What are you maundering about?'

"'It is the spirit of the fish!' he faltered, and his eyes were filled with fear.

"'Spirits of nitre!' I cried impatiently, for the fear in the faces of those two brave men, was beginning to get under my skin. 'A fish can't even bite you, let alone haunt you!' But I tell you that I could not make it out as ridiculous even to myself with those two frightened men in front of me, and the maniacs howling outside. Angwak looked upon

me with pity—it was actually pity, for I saw it with my two eyes.

“‘Chif,’ he said. ‘These people live through the summer and until the ice comes with the seal, upon the fishes in this river. We have used the seal oil for our cooking, and the spirit of the fishes will hear of it, for that woman was Pugnana, wife of Poya-tac, and she is a great witch woman. Then the fish spirit will be angry, and the fish will cease to run. Then all these people will starve. Poya-tac will not have to ask them to kill us, then.’

“And a wild shout which arose outside the tent as he finished seemed to bear witness to his words.

“I immediately ran out into the open, intent on reassuring them, but they fled from me as though I had the plague; they fled from me, so that I had hardly emerged from the tent before the place was as clear of Eskimos as a village of prairie dogs is clear of the little animals when you advance upon it. I returned to the tent after patrolling the village calling upon the people to come and talk with me.

“‘They will not come,’ said Angwak gravely. ‘They will not speak to you or touch you, or even look at you until Pugnana tells them what to do. We are in danger now, Chif.’

“I stood and stared at them for a moment.

“‘Well,’ said I, ‘we need not starve to death.’ And I went forward with our meal.

“They had some sort of powwow in the village that night, and I slept very little with the thought of what they might decide to do. But they did not disturb us all that night, nor throughout the next day. But that did not make us happy, for as it happened, and as true as I’m sitting here, the next day the fish did not run, and never a one was caught.”

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE GODS MAKE TRUCE

“**I** SPENT the afternoon cleaning our rifles. We were in an awkward position now, for savages do not forgive you for offending their gods. It means too much to them. Blasphemy against Eskimo gods means that polar bears come into the villages and speak, mountains move, and the sun and moon do what they can to punish the offenders. In this case a member of the community had used seal oil while the natives were on such friendly terms with the fish that fishes were swimming into their trap at the rate of hundreds a day.

“This, of course, would horribly offend the fish spirits, for it was by way of snubbing them, and the vengeance of those spirits was logical; they simply severed diplomatic relations. If this community wanted to use seal oil, well, it could go out and live on seals; and it could just see for itself whether the seals would treat them as well as the fishes had. So the fishes stopped running. That is the way the Eskimos looked at it, and, you know, Angwak and Alecummik lost much of their courage from the realization that they had taken part in this offense against the gods.

“It occurred to me, as I sat there scheming for the right thing to do, that the witch woman, Pugnana, was putting up a job on me. It was a trick to turn the Eskimos against us, and that confounded coincidence that had stopped the fish from running had given her all the luck. The only thing for me to do was the bold, straightforward thing. I

must go forth among the people and tell them that the fish would run again. I must face it out against Pugnana in public meeting and see what the great White Father's guarantee would do.

"But before I had a chance to face it out with Pugnana in public meeting, Pugnana played a card for herself. Poya-tac came to our tent and spoke to the wall without looking at me.

"'The fish have stopped running,' he said sadly. 'We must make friends once more with the spirits, and it is the white man who must make friends. The people are meeting to-night in the speak house and we want you to be there.' Then still gravely and rather sadly, he walked out.

"'It is a spirit meeting,' moaned Angwak in a tone that made me think of human sacrifices. 'They are holding a meeting and Pugnana will speak to the spirits.' He stared at me for some minutes in silence. 'They will make what sacrifice they can,' he said, and turned away from me as if he were ashamed.

"We went over to that speak house in the dim evening of an Arctic summer's day. The black and brown earth frowned upon the wretched huts of the village, and the leaden sky pressed down upon the distant rises of the coastal plain. I took my rifle with me, and so did Alecummik. Angwak seemed to have gone Eskimo. He carried no arms and did not stay beside me. As we proceeded to the huge tent which was called the speak house, the Eskimos of the village came crowding about us, and I knew from their solemn faces that they were really escorting us as prisoners to that assembly.

"They crowded into that huge and badly ventilated tent with us, and sat about us in a crowd. Me, they seated on a bed platform, and then they piled up about me, standing,



sitting, kneeling, squatting. They pressed me about on every side, and I thought, as I clutched my rifle across my knees, that I must have looked as though posing for my photograph with a host of Eskimo friends. But they were not friendly. They were very serious, and all bore an expression of pained regret and great anxiety.

"Then Poya-tac came in with a rather tall young Eskimo who stood close beside him and listened to the talk of the little group who accompanied the great man. I listened to the chatter about me and heard the word, 'Kahnak' uttered here and there, and I saw the tall young Eskimo turn to the sound of that name. So I knew that here was the man I had so long searched for, and it was my luck that I should meet him in a host of hostile natives. But I had little time to philosophize, for very abruptly the skin on one side of the tent was torn violently aside, and there, against a triangle of flaming sky, stood Pugnana, the witch woman.

"A deathly silence fell upon the house and she stood there in the silence gazing straight at me. I returned her stare, and examined with interest her costume. She wore a coat of many colored furs, and she clicked and rattled when she moved because of countless strands of ivory and bone ornamentation which she wore. There were many teeth and tusks and bones and sinews strung about her neck and waist. There were bracelets of wire and pendants of copper rivets and flashing spangles of tin and iron and nails and beads. Everything remotely suitable to the ornamentation of a witch woman which might be gathered from driftwood, animal, mineral, or trading station, had been called into service by this extraordinary priestess, and she used to particularly good advantage tufts of musk ox wool which had been dyed in most amazing colors. Her dark eyes glared across the room with great intensity, and when



she moved forward in a line which aimed straight at me, the swaying of her rich fur coat, the brilliant tufts of wool, and the crackling rustle of her ornaments combined with the flaming sky behind her to give the effect of some monstrous animal moving silently through the hot and fetid atmosphere of that crowded space.

"It was uncanny, I tell you, and it held me as spellbound as the rest of them. But what followed was more horrible than my words will be able to tell.

"She moved forward, or rather, that furry body moved forward, for it was not possible to believe it was a woman. It moved forward until it stood some six feet away from me, and then a peculiar change came over it. The woman's face became set in a horrible grimace of agony. The body seemed to become rigid under the fur, and she stood there, like something which was frozen and in pain. Then a hideous noise filled the room. She was wailing. Wailing like a lost soul, and she writhed as she stood until the wail died with a deep catch in the base of her throat. The sound of her wail filled the room, rent the atmosphere and wrenched horribly the nerves and minds of every human being. When it died, it left me with the feeling that I had witnessed an agony unbelievable. But I didn't show that, you understand, I sat silently and never ceased to gaze at her, trying to assure myself that all was trickery and fraud.

"After her wail had died, she stood for a moment rigid, and then she started to sway, so that all her fur swung and her ornaments rattled. While she swayed she chanted a sort of protest, and the voice was not her own. It was high pitched and hysterical, like the voice of a person possessed of demons; and more and more, her body seemed that of a monstrous, furry animal.

"'I am the fish spirit!' she cried. 'The fish spirit tries

to slay me! The fish spirit tries to put out my soul!' And with an ear-splitting shriek she suddenly lurched away from me, and plunged to the earth on her face.

"I still sat silent, as did the whole crowd in that dim and stuffy room. Suddenly, on either side of the mass of slightly moving fur upon the ground, two torches flared. They flared up in red and angry flame, and the smoke and stench of the smoke filled the room. The mass of fur moved and with astonishing agility the witch woman sprang to her feet and whirled to face me. I had to exert all my self-control then, to betray nothing of my emotion in my face. For she was horribly altered.

"Now she was a beast indeed. Her teeth had seemed to grow in that moment when she was on the floor. Two fangs protruded between her lips on either side of her mouth, and her upper lip curled back as she faced me to show the teeth of a wolf under her glistening eyes. The many colored wool had fallen over her forehead, so that the eyes and the fangs were all I saw of her face. And she raised her arms, so that I saw in the light of the flares that her hands were covered with fur, and a great claw glistened in the center of each paw.

"I sat in a sort of fascination and watched her as she moved stealthily toward me. I could hear the breath of the Eskimos all about me, coming in a myriad short gasps, so that it seemed as if the whole fetid air was panting.

"Slowly she approached me, and she made strange, clicking noises behind those glistening fangs as she drew near. Her arms rose and, when she had come to within three feet of me, she raised her right arm suddenly higher. Immediately I came to myself, for the gesture she made, despite the appearance of an impossible monster which she had created, was the gesture a man makes who is about to stab home with a knife, and I saw that in the claw which emerged from the

fur of that right arm, was a knife held in a human hand which was clothed with the skin of a fox.

"She must have seen something of my disillusionment, for she did not see the stroke through. She stood with her arm upraised, and I believe that her quick wits were dealing with lightning agility with the new problem which she now confronted. Suddenly she saw her way, and shrieked out in her high-pitched voice:

"'It is the spirit of the fish. A white man must die before the fish will run again!'

"And she pounced forward, raised her arm and plunged the knife at my throat. I was ready for her, and I caught the fur-clad arm midway. She was a strong woman, and I knew that everything depended upon my subduing her without a struggle, so I exerted all my strength upon the twist of that arm, and she sank to her knees with everything of witchery gone out of her eyes in her fear of me. Even then, though, she had the presence of mind to turn her face away and take from her mouth the teeth of the wolf which she had placed there.

"As I released my hold upon her arm, she arose to her feet with the expression on her face of one who comes out of a dream, and with that expression on her face, she turned to the Eskimos who crowded about me, awaiting only her command to strike me dead.

"'Have no fear,' she said to them. 'The spirit of the fish has been overcome. It occupied my soul and tried to make me kill this white man. But he was too strong for it.'

"And I turned to Alecummik at my side.

"'Tell them!' I commanded him. And I roared out at that assembled mob with all the power of my voice. 'The fish will run to-morrow!' I roared. 'To-morrow the fish will run again!'

"With which, after Alecummik and Angwak, who came

## *RENFREW RIDES AGAIN*

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quickly to our side, had made them aware of the pregnant message which I had bellowed into the very souls of them, I pushed my way through the mob and left the tent. When I got back to my own quarters I discovered that my rifle was loaded with blanks and had to listen in silence to Angwak's explanation that he had agreed with Poya-tac to play that trick upon me on condition that we were not all slain in the moment when we entered the speak house. It was a very trying night.

"But in the morning the fish were running, and a great load was taken from my mind, for I had no illusions about what our position would have been if they had not run that morning, and killing Eskimos is not in the best traditions of the Mounted.

"It was in the morning, too, that Kahnak came into my tent, and explained that the people had insisted that he come and talk with me. I explained to him the meaning of justice, and he promised to come with me to Herschell Island, where he is driving dogs for the police as a punishment for his crime. But he is homesick and will soon go back to his people."

## CHAPTER XXX

### GRIM EVIDENCE

SCOTTY and Dick Ranney appreciated the story of Deming's talk with Kahnak to the extent of sitting for a long time after the Sergeant's deep voice had died away into silence, and doing nothing more than stare thoughtfully into the fire, as the Sergeant did himself. But when Scotty broke the enchantment of that quiet, his words betrayed that it was not upon the fate of Kahnak, nor the adventures of Deming that he had been pondering.

"What's the news from Renfrew, Sergeant Deming?" he asked. "When is he coming back?"

"He should be back to-morrow," said the Sergeant. But the Sergeant was wrong.

Renfrew did not get back on the morrow, nor for a good many more to-morrows, for his pursuit of Barto had left him with an extremely lame foot. He was kept in hospital for several weeks, and then, when he was about again, the boys saw little of him, for he was almost immediately called into the north.

Renfrew proceeded to a northern post in obedience to a suggestion which gave him no alternative. The suggestion came in the mail and was from Renfrew's Divisional Superintendent. It read as follows:

Constable Sheehan at Tawny River post has procured evidence which leads him to believe that a murder has been committed in his district. In view of work you did in the case of Desmond Lyfe, deceased, you will



proceed immediately upon receipt of these orders to the above named (Tawny River) and report to Constable Sheehan to give him what assistance you can.

H. BARNES MEDFORD, *Supt.*,  
Commanding N. Division.

Renfrew, clad in an outfit of travel-stained woods clothing, arrived at Tawny River on horseback two days after receiving these instructions and made his way at once to the police post. Sheehan, a bluff, hearty Irishman whose good nature covered an inner shell of unyielding firmness, was seated at his desk, painfully composing an official letter. He greeted Renfrew with a friendly reserve which is characteristic of men who require something more than a smile as the passport to comradeship. Renfrew presented his instructions.

"Ah," said Sheehan, as he recognized a fellow officer. "Then you'll have sent your trappings on by the boat?"

Renfrew nodded.

"It should be here to-night," he said. "What's the weighty problem?"

Sheehan frowned.

"I'm wondering whether you'd better come into this as a man of the force or as a private individual," he said. "There's various people to deal with, ye understand, an' if it's a policeman ye're going to be we'd best wait for yer trappings."

"You mean that this evidence Medford writes about is public knowledge?"

Sheehan still frowned at him, obviously wrapped in thought. It was obvious also that much of his thought had to do with Renfrew. He was studying the new arrival, measuring him, as it were, for the job in hand.

"Medford says ye're a cross between Sherlock Holmes and a pedigreed bloodhound," he ventured at last. "Faith, it's



Sherlock Holmes himself and nobody else we're needing this minute at Tawny River."

Renfrew grinned.

"What's your evidence, and who's in it with you?" he asked.

"Laycroft, the lawyer, and Mayflower, who is the Company factor. It was Bush Tansey who brought in the—the evidence—and it was Mayflower he took it to, Bush being a Company trapper. Mayflower brought it to me, and Laycroft being present at the time, the three of them are in it."

"What's the evidence?"

Sheehan gazed at him for a moment in silence, and then, not breaking the silence, he arose and walked to a closet which was built into the wall of his little orderly room. He unlocked the closet door with great deliberation and swung it open. For a moment he gave his back to Renfrew as he reached into the closet for the "evidence." When he turned again he held in his hand a gunny sack which hung heavy in his grasp. This he brought to the desk and, eyeing Renfrew solemnly, up-ended it. From the mouth of the sack rolled onto the desk the skull of a man and many miscellaneous bones of a human body. Renfrew gazed upon them with a calmness appropriate to the fact that he didn't want to appear surprised.

"These," explained Sheehan, "were found in the Tawny River, not nearly so far away from the cabin of Bush Tansey as ye might think."

"And it was Tansey who found them?"

"Tansey says that it was; and he brought them in to Mayflower."

"Has Tansey any idea of whose bones these are?"

"He has said that he knows nothing about them save that they were flung up to the river bank by the current and interfered with his traps."

"You mean that you believe he knows more than he admits?"

"I know he knows more than he has admitted up to now."

"Why?"

"Ah, but is this the way I should be after tellin' you the story?" Sheehan grinned at Renfrew with a great breadth of good humor. "It is not," he said. "You should have the story in the order of the events as they occurred. First I must tell ye of what Mayflower thinks, for it was he who had first say. Then ye must hear of what Laycroft believes, for he was remarkably quick to oppose Mayflower's circumstantial case. Bush Tansey's evidence comes after."

Renfrew laughed.

"All right," he agreed. "By all means let me have the events in the order of their occurrence."

Sheehan nodded solemnly, denying the twinkle in his eyes.

"Now," he said approvingly, "ye talk like Sherlock Holmes himself." Then he became suddenly serious; eager to make clear the mystery which had caused him, with a remarkable understanding of his own limitations, to send for the help of Renfrew.

"Ye must first understand that there came to these parts five years ago, a queer, gruff person named Striker. He came from England and took a homestead here which failed to profit him. He hired a less than half-witted halfbreed named Parandean—Victor Parandean—and the two worked on the homestead until a year ago last October. For some time Striker had been speaking of returning to England, and when Laycroft undertook to finance his passage for him, he pulled up his stakes and left these parts. The halfbreed, Parandean, left the country at about the same time; that is, he was never seen about here again. I'm free to confess that the going of both of 'em was abrupt and mysterious enough, for neither of them so much as said good-by, but

I do not think that is sufficient to accuse Striker of such a grave matter as murder is."

"Who does?"

"Mayflower. It is his theory that Striker left these parts in a hurry because he had killed the poor breed with whom he was forever wrangling; and it is Mayflower's opinion, moreover, that these bones belong to no other person than Victor Parandeu."

"And what does Laycroft think?"

"Laycroft. He thinks Mayflower is a fool; he has thought so since the first day the two of them met, and he will think so as long as he lives. For that reason anything Mayflower says is sufficient to give him an opposite opinion."

"Does he believe the bones belong to some one else?"

"To any one but Parandeu. As a matter of fact he laughs at the thought of murder as he laughs at everything else. He believes the poor wretch whose bones these are was drowned."

Renfrew grinned at the probability; at the thought of such a tame ending to a mystery which suggested murder.

"Why not?" he asked.

Sheehan did not answer him immediately. Instead, he leaned over the table and after some discrimination picked up two rib bones from the collection.

"Give those the attention of your hawk-like eyes," he said.

Renfrew examined the two bones and stiffened into an eager interest. He looked up at Sheehan with the flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes of a man who has become the victim of the greatest fascination in the world; the fascination of an unsolved riddle.

"The mark of a knife!" he cried. "That knife was driven home by a strong man; see, it has almost cut the rib in half!"

Sheehan nodded with approval.

"So far," he observed good-naturedly, "you come up to the sleuthlike standard I have set in these parts for myself. Laycroft will not admit but what the mark was made by the rocks of the stream bed, whereby Laycroft might apply his opinion of Mayflower to himself."

"And how about Bush Tansey?"

For a moment Sheehan drummed with his fingers on the desk; then suddenly he flung open the topmost drawer and, snatching a paper from it, passed it to Renfrew. Renfrew read at a glance the pencil scrawl which occupied less than half the thumb-marked paper.

"If you will come out to my cabin," it read, "I can tell you the truth about Parandean and the skull I found in the river. Come after dark. TANSEY."

"I received that this morning in the mails," said Sheehan. "The queer man must have passed this house with the letter in his hand when he went to the post office with it."

"Then either Laycroft or Mayflower must know more of the matter than they admit."

"And why?" Sheehan was surprised into a voice of astonishment.

"Tansey carried this letter past your house to mail it to you, and he wants us to come to him after dark. That means he is afraid or for some other reason does not want some person unknown to us to find out that he is in touch with the police. You tell me that Laycroft and Mayflower are the only men besides Tansey who know these bones have been discovered. That looks as if either Mayflower or Laycroft is the man he fears; therefore I take it one of them knows more than he has told."

Sheehan's expression was divided between puzzlement and admiration. The latter emotion first found voice in him.

"You may call me Watson," he said at last. "Now I'd stake a year's pay that Mayflower is honest as the day, and

Laycroft is, too. Still, and all, what you say . . . Ah, but speculation will get us to no place at all; let us be going down the street to see these two."

He arose and strode over to the hook upon which hung his Stetson.

"Is it a policeman you are, or am I to introduce you as a gentleman from Chicago who is by way of being interested in murders because he's in the packing business?"

Renfrew laughed.

"It's a policeman I am," he cried. "What good would it do to pretend otherwise?"

"Come on, then," said Sheehan; and Renfrew found himself striding down the plank sidewalk of the principal street of Tawny River beside his vigorous and exuberant companion.



## CHAPTER XXXI

### QUEER CHARACTERS

**I**N the long gray room of the Ranney Ranch house, Scotty McLeod and Dick Ranney plugged away at their studies while in the private office behind a store of the Hudson's Bay Company, in a remote northern settlement, Renfrew, of whom Scotty thought too often as he wrestled with Latin verbs, investigated a murder.

The store of the Hudson's Bay Company at Tawny River is a frame building, neat, like all that great company's properties, and stacked with every need of white man and Indian for his home, his comfort and his vocation. In charge of this lavish stock, as he was in charge of all the diverse affairs of the company in a district larger than the state of Delaware, was Mr. Thornet Mayflower; and when the two policemen entered the headquarters of Mr. Mayflower's domain they found him in his cozy office at the rear of the store in low-voiced conversation with Mr. Steven Laycroft, lawyer and country gentleman, as country gentlemen exist in such out-of-the-way places as Tawny River, Alberta.

"You will now know what it is to hear a grand, queer quarrel, Mr. Renfrew," murmured Sheehan, as they glimpsed the two men beyond the glass partition. And Renfrew agreed later that, as a quarrel, this conversation between Mayflower and Laycroft was decidedly queer.

In the first place there was something queer about the two men themselves. In a city one might have hardly noticed them, but in this backwater of one of Canada's lesser water-

ways, either one of them would, alone, have been remarkable. Mayflower, clad in a checkered woolen shirt, corduroy breeches and knee-high boots, had the long, sour face of such a tired, disillusioned clerk as might have graced the pages of Dickens. Laycroft, tall, gray haired, but incorrigibly youthful, fitted the wild country of the Northwest less appropriately than he would have fitted the window seat of a fashionable London club. He was extremely handsome, extremely courteous and in all events entirely unruffled. He was clothed in a suit of splendidly tailored gray tweeds, he was shod with neatly fitting and superbly polished boots of rich brown leather, and he was decorated with the most perfectly arranged scarf of imported silk which glowed softly against the creamy whiteness of his soft-collared shirt. His waistcoat was checked with black and white.

Mayflower surprised you because his clothes were those of a woodsman upon a man who looked like a city clerk, while Laycroft surprised you because his clothes were those of a London dandy upon a man who belonged with his clothes. The effect of associating these two men with the thought of a skull and bones fished from a wilderness torrent, produced in Renfrew's mind an atmosphere of unreality which was like the experience of a dream. And while he struggled mentally against this effect, the two of them quarreled in front of him; quarreled in a grand, queer manner whereby Mayflower sneered out in his sour way remarks of the most vitriolic contempt which Laycroft greeted in his courteous, gentle manner as the richest of jokes. Neither of them raised his voice above that common to the most quiet, well-bred conversation.

Both of them nodded to Sheehan and smiled at Renfrew when they entered, but both of them were too occupied with their contention to permit the policemen immediately to interrupt them.

"Mr. Mayflower," said Laycroft with a smile as the two men entered, "I do believe that you'd be willing to add to the amusing affairs of life by accusing me of murdering this poor halfbreed myself."

Mayflower sneered at him sourly.

"I would not hesitate to believe anything whatever which made you out a villain, Mr. Laycroft," he said.

Laycroft arose from his chair and sauntered over to a table by the door where he lounged carelessly, swinging one leg youthfully above the carpet. His action had all the studied grace of the leading man in a drawing-room comedy.

"I've come to see ye, Mr. Mayflower," announced Sheehan. "Or rather it is the two of us have come to see ye, about Mr. Laycroft's case of drowning."

Laycroft threw back his handsome head and laughed charmingly. Mayflower grinned a sour grin.

"This is Mr. Renfrew of the Mounted Police," explained Sheehan.

Mayflower arose and moodily gripped Renfrew's hand. His long, cynical features were eloquent of his antipathy to all and sundry who dared enter this case. Laycroft came forward to shake hands genially and murmur his happiness at meeting Mr. Renfrew. He then resumed his chair, clasped his hands, and beamed up at Renfrew with great amusement.

"Mr. Mayflower will tell you that a murder has been done," he said. "Mr. Mayflower has been so good as to solve the mystery for you. I hope that you had a pleasant journey here?"

"Very," said Renfrew; and he thought the journey well rewarded by the opportunity it had given him of meeting these two characters.

"You're in mufti," snapped Mayflower, spitefully.

"Yes, I thought when I left Edmonton that there might be some detective work."

"Oh, no," murmured Laycroft. "It has all been solved. It seems that the murderer is me." He pronounced the word "me" with an irresistible note of wistfulness. Renfrew smiled.

"I hope not," he said. "We have to find out who the corpse was, before we can guess whether it was a murder or not."

Laycroft smiled happily.

"Oh, the corpse is all decided," he said. "Ask Mr. Mayflower."

At this, Mayflower leaned forbiddingly across the corner of his desk.

"Mr. Laycroft is an actor," he said, but he said it as though he were making an announcement. "Gay London must have been remarkably willing to see Mr. Laycroft go to America to put up with the loss of such a shining theatrical light. But the Dominion of Canada is not in the habit of placing such crimes as murder in the hands of players and vagabonds for solution." He swung suddenly to Renfrew, and spoke with extraordinary warmth. "If you have the welfare of Canada at heart, Mr. Renfrew, for God's sake don't listen to that renegade zany in the play actor's clothing while you're dealing with this crime. I tell you that it is murder! The criminal is Mr. Laycroft's creature, Anthony Striker, and the victim is Victor Parandeu!"

With which words Mr. Mayflower sat back in his chair with an amazing resumption of calm and sneered over at his adversary a glance at once challenging and triumphant.

Again Mr. Laycroft laughed, and again his laugh acted as a charm to soften the bitterness of Mayflower's voice.

"I suppose it is fitting," said Laycroft lightly, "that since

I appear to Mr. Mayflower as an actor, he should provide the dramatics."

"It would be more to the point," said Renfrew, "if both of you would forego the pleasure of each other's conversation and give me what help you can toward solving this mystery."

"Precisely," smiled Laycroft. "The needs of the Mounted Police should undoubtedly come before the pleasures of conversation."

"And how can we be of help to you, Mr. Renfrew?" Mayflower's question, apparently addressed to Renfrew, was very deftly turned by the speaker into a reproof of Mr. Laycroft's levity. Mayflower achieved this by speaking to Renfrew, but gazing with an expression of the deepest contempt at the impervious Mr. Laycroft.

"By permitting me to ask you a few questions," said Renfrew.

Mayflower nodded his assent while Laycroft smiled agreeably; then each eyed the other, smile meeting spite in a manner which made the atmosphere fairly sizzle.

"First, Mr. Mayflower," said Renfrew, and the cool, businesslike quality of his voice was like a call to attention, "can you tell me why you believe the bones which the trapper Tansey found are the remains of Victor Parandean, and why you believe that Striker killed him?"

Mayflower let his gaze linger for a moment upon the mocking smile of his antagonist, and then, suddenly, as though by an effort of will putting Laycroft out of his mind he turned fully upon Renfrew.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Renfrew," he said. "I know something about Striker. Striker was a great parasite of Mr. Laycroft's, who likes parasites because they permit him to play the grand gentleman." Laycroft bowed his appreciation of



this compliment, and Renfrew resisted the smile which the extraordinary controversy provoked in him.

"Go on," he urged; and admired profoundly the fortitude with which both the contestants took the verbal punishment each inflicted.

"But Bush Tansey knew Striker far better than Mr. Laycroft can know anything more human than a tailor's dummy. Tansey and Striker were, in a queer sort of way, chums. Now Tansey is a Company man, and in that way I get to know much that is in his mind. He told me more about Striker than is commonly known, and I happen to know that shortly before Parandean and Striker both disappeared they had been quarreling for weeks like cat and dog." With this he came to a full stop and turned to grin in sour triumph at Mr. Laycroft, who stared calmly through the middle button of the speaker's shirt.

"But that is a long cry from murder," said Renfrew.

"Oh, yes, it is a long cry," sneered Mayflower. "But listen to this. Striker was mad. What do you think of that? How does that sound? Three years ago Striker was kicked in the head by a mule; just behind the ear, he was kicked; and Tansey says that he was always a little bit cracked since that accident. Striker was mad, and Parandean was a half-wit. Can you see that combination fighting together? Can you see the two maniacs out there alone on the homestead, getting more and more upon one another's crazy nerves until they both boiled over?" He leaned forward in his seat, and Renfrew observed that as he became excited his voice became lower and lower, until he was literally whispering his accusation with a strangely forceful hissing voice. "That's why Striker killed the halfbreed; and that's why he left the country without so much as a good-by to any man. Not even to Tansey who had been his only friend!"

A silence followed. The very atmosphere of the room confessed the spell of those low-voiced, passionately eager words.

"And what of your theory, Mr. Laycroft?" inquired Renfrew.

Laycroft turned to the policeman with a quiet, confident smile.

"I may as well confess to you, Mr. Renfrew," he began, "since it is not a secret to any one in Tawny River, I may as well confess that in my opinion Mr. Mayflower is a particularly troublesome species of fool." Again Renfrew repressed a smile as he saw Mayflower's sour face twisted into the grin of one who has come to relish his opponent's technique. "Of course," continued Laycroft, easily, "my opinion may not be of value; but there it is, and I think that Mr. Mayflower's words uphold it. His theory regarding the origin of Mr. Sheehan's gruesome little exhibit is the rank-est sort of sensationalism. I grant you that Parandean was a half-wit, but Mr. Mayflower's belief that Striker was insane is established entirely upon the word of Tansey, an ignorant man who violently disagreed with everything Striker did or said.

"As for Striker's abrupt and secret departure, out of which Mr. Mayflower makes so much capital, I can assure you that it was abrupt only because it was not secret. Tansey will tell you that Striker had often spoken to him of returning to England, and he spoke to me about it often. He went so far as to persuade me to forward him the money for his fare, and I for my part went so far as to book passage for him on a boat which left from Montreal on a certain Friday in October. (I can give you the date if you like; it is among the files in my office.) The miserable man was enraged with me because I would not give him the cash to pay for his passage himself (Tansey will testify to that).

and refused pointblank to use the passage I had booked for him. At first I didn't believe he really intended to turn me down, but when the date of sailing approached and he made no arrangement to leave, I went out to his cabin and had it out with him. As a result he agreed to take the passage I had arranged, and in order to make the boat in time had to go down the river with some Indians who were traveling that night by boat. All this I can vouch for myself, and I think Tansey will bear me out with regard to most of it. Striker no more killed Parandeau than I did. Why, Parandeau even helped to carry Striker's effects down to the boat. He walked back to the cabin with me, and served me a cup of coffee before I went home."

And with that, it was Laycroft's turn to smile triumphantly at Mr. Mayflower.

"And you believe that the bones are the remains of a drowned person unknown?"

Laycroft nodded genially.

"You understand me perfectly," he said.

"But what of the mark of the knife?" grinned Sheehan wickedly.

"Aye," sneered Mayflower. "You saw those rib bones. The man was stabbed."

"Rubbish," smiled Laycroft. "That's yellow journalism. You can't expect the police to think in terms of the penny press."

"Mr. Laycroft is right," said Renfrew unexpectedly; and he had to stare very straight at Sheehan to repress the immediate protest which his words aroused in the Irish constable. "The police cannot leap to conclusions. We have had no expert opinion upon the condition of the bones which Tansey found, and until we have obtained it, I see no reason to believe that the marks upon those bones might not have been made by the stones in the river. Until we obtain better

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evidence I don't see how we can entertain the idea that these bones indicate murder."

"Mr. Renfrew," cried Mayflower, "you are a fool."

Renfrew grinned.

"It cannot do harm to have just one more in Tawny River," he said. "Meanwhile I shall have to be about our business. Good-day, gentlemen."

As he walked back to the post with Sheehan, Renfrew had to explain himself.

"For the present," he said, "the most sensible attitude to take is the most innocent one. If there is really a crime behind this it will do the criminal no harm to think that we don't suspect it."

Sheehan thumped him heartily upon the back.

"You can continue to call me Watson," he said exuberantly.

"We will go out into the wilderness to-night, my dear Watson, and see friend Tansey," Renfrew replied.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### A DEAD MAN TESTIFIES

**W**HEN, late that evening, the two policemen, clad in full uniform, set forth on horseback, Renfrew would have carried the gruesome evidence which they had decided to take with them, but Sheehan insisted on taking it himself.

"It will be a thing to remember," he said. "To ride through the dark wilderness on such a grand, ghostly night with a bag of bones behind the cantle of me saddle. I shall carry them meself." And the bones of the dead man rattled as they trotted through the wavering shadows.

The air was very fresh and cool. A breeze was blowing, which caused the trees through which the trail wound to murmur and sigh, moan and whisper all about them; and clouds scurried before that swift fresh wind, so that the shadows of the forest were overwhelmed now and then by the more complete shadows of the clouds. At such times they were plunged into black and impenetrable darkness so that the moaning of the trees, the plashing of the swift river, the rattle of the dead man's bones and the plod of the hoofs were all they had to remind them that they were in the world.

It was late when they arrived at the cabin of Bush Tansey, and it was dark, for by that time the clouds had become thickly banked in the sky and no moonlight shone through. It was so dark indeed, that it is doubtful whether they would have known that they had reached Tansey's



cabin had not the cabin door been open and the door of the stove within ajar so that the red glow of the fire was like a red cavern in the blackness of the night.

"Hello!" exclaimed Sheehan. "Looks as if the old boy's gone out."

They dismounted and would have entered the cabin had not Sheehan's foot caught upon something which yielded softly to its pressure. Immediately Sheehan flashed his light, and Renfrew saw that a corpse lay upon the threshold of the cabin. Sheehan saw something more; he saw at once that the corpse was all that remained of Bush Tansey. With a little cry, which was a cry of pity, he dropped on his knees beside the body.

"Ah," he murmured indignantly. "They've called him to his door and knifed him!"

Renfrew bent and helped Sheehan to lift the pitiful burden. They carried it into the silent, red-lit cabin, and placed it upon the cot which was still marked with the pressure of what had been but a few hours, even a few minutes, before, the body of a man vigorous with life. It appeared that Tansey had arisen from his rest upon that cot to answer a knock upon his door. No doubt he had believed that knock to announce the arrival of the redcoat whose coming he awaited; but the redcoat had come only in time to discover that in truth, it had been for Tansey a summons from a visitor no less unwelcome than grim Death. The wide gash of a knife wound in the trapper's breast bore testimony to how that visitor had come.

"Well!" Sheehan burst forth at last. "It is good betting that this man was not drowned."

Renfrew grinned wearily.

"We'll stay here to-night, I suppose?"

Sheehan strode to the door and looked out into the darkness. It was complete and impenetrable: the forest was

black, the sky above only less black, and above the moaning of the wind could be heard the whisper of rain.

"Yes," said Sheehan. "We will stay."

Together they went out into the rain and tethered the horses. They carried into the cabin their saddles and the bag which contained the bones which had been the gruesome portents of this mystery which faced them. Sheehan no longer spoke lightly of Sherlock Holmes, nor did he surrender to Renfrew the details which he had dealt out so casually in the past. He now watched Renfrew in silence as that officer began systematically to ransack the trapper's cabin, and wrung his mind for the least word or action every member of his district had uttered or committed within the limit of his memory, which was an exceedingly good one.

"It is Greek to me," he muttered at last. "All Greek. There is no one I can hitch up with this occurrence. No one." He was gazing moodily at Renfrew as he spoke, and he became suddenly conscious, as he ceased, of the fact that Renfrew was bent with intense preoccupation over a paper which he held in the light of the dim table lamp which he had lighted.

"What is it you've found?" Sheehan demanded.

"This," said Renfrew; and after a last, intent look at it, he passed the paper to his companion. "That was mailed from England more than five years ago," he explained, glancing at the envelope on the table before him.

Sheehan read the words which were penned carefully upon the cheap notepaper in his hand.

DEAR BURT [they ran]: Since your sister died I can't keep on with this job. The life of a prison guard is a dog's life, and now my wife is gone, I'm going to give it up. If that man Laycroft is seven hundred and sixty-

four, and I think he is, he will be in clover and since I know what I know he will be a good man to have as a neighbor. If you'll show me the ropes Tawny River is the place for me to come to. With best wishes

TONY.

"See what that means?" asked Renfrew.

Sheehan wrinkled his brow.

"Can't say it means anything, to me. I suppose it means that Striker, who wrote this, is Tansey's brother-in-law, but I don't see that that gets us anywhere. What does he mean by that line about Laycroft?"

Renfrew, taking the paper from him, studied it once more.

"Look here, Sheehan," he said at last, "I don't want to appear mysterious or dramatic, but I have an idea that this letter means a great deal. I'm going to ask you to let me play with the idea a little while, and if I'm on the right track I'll explain it to you later. Is that all right?"

Sheehan laughed his big, explosive laugh.

"Would you have me think that you have read no books?" he cried good-naturedly. "Who is Watson to demand an explanation from his chief?"

Renfrew jumped up from his chair and made to hurl at the Irishman's head the package of papers which he had dug out from Tansey's littered cupboard. Sheehan dodged to avoid him and stumbled over a burlap bag which rattled as he kicked it; and the two men stood, suddenly transfixed, turning with a common impulse to the cot upon which the dead man lay.

"Hm," muttered Renfrew at last. "I want a look at them."

He reached down and picked up the burlap bag. Again the gruesome relicts were rolled out upon the table, and again Renfrew found himself studying the worn, wasted

bones. He carefully went over them while Sheehan as carefully examined the mass of old letters, accounts, bills and newspaper clippings which had been brought to light from many nooks and crannies of the cabin.

It was a singular scene, and a mournful one, which was relieved only by the bright colors of the two uniforms which with shining brass and vivid scarlet, brilliant yellow and the luster of polished leather, filled the narrow confines of the cabin. In gruesome contrast to those bright colors, however, were the gray bones which gleamed in the lamplight, the still, limp figure which rested on the cot: and outside the wind hummed a mournful song and beat the rain against the walls and windows. Two scarlet-clad policemen, shut in a dimly lit cabin, examined the bones of one dead man and the personal effects of another who lay with elaborate disdain of their mission and slept a long sleep within arm's length of them.

At last Renfrew drew himself up in his chair and gazed for some time thoughtfully at Sheehan.

"There is a thing for one of us to do," he said. "And I'm afraid that your position makes you the man for the job."

"What's that?" inquired Sheehan.

"We must get Mayflower and Laycroft out here," said Renfrew.

"Now?"

"If you ride in now, it will be past dawn by the time they get here."

"For what do we require them?"

"To give us information. I'm thinking they can help us find the man who came to Tansey's door before we did."

"And how?"

"I shall ask them, and sooner or later one of them will tell us."

## *RENFREW RIDES AGAIN*

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Sheehan shrugged his shoulders and walked over to Tansey's raincoat.

"I'll go," he said. "And would you not have me bring back an Indian tracker or two? There will be some hunting to do in the daylight."

"Good idea," approved Renfrew. "Only have the trackers come later. I would have Laycroft and Mayflower think we are completely at a loss how to proceed."

"I see," nodded Sheehan. "We will be here in no time."



## CHAPTER XXXIII

### MR. MAYFLOWER IS VINDICATED

THE light of a damp morning shone upon Tansey's clearing in the forest when Sheehan came back with his two guests. Laycroft was now clad in fine riding clothes; Mayflower in the same incongruous woods clothing which had made him seem so queer a character the day before.

"So this time it is Tansey," said Laycroft with a remarkable blend of lightness and gravity, as he greeted Renfrew. "Mr. Mayflower is at loss for a theory."

Mayflower glanced at him with contempt and strode to the still figure of the murdered trapper.

"He was a good man," he said bitterly. "Have we got to solve this mystery for you, too, Mr. Renfrew?" he sneered, as he turned abruptly to the policeman. "I should have thought that with two constables present, we might have slept safely in our beds!"

"It is merely that I wanted to ask you some questions," explained Renfrew, gravely.

"Of course," Laycroft subsided into a chair and regarded fondly the beautiful lines of his polished riding boot. "It is always the duty of the police to ask questions. But couldn't you have asked them after breakfast?"

"No," said Renfrew, and Laycroft glanced up quickly at the note of command with which the redcoat spoke. "Tell me, Mr. Laycroft," continued Renfrew, "where is Anthony Striker?"

"Ah," murmured Laycroft, "I knew you'd want that

date." He reached into the breast pocket of his riding coat and drew forth a notebook. For a moment he turned the tiny pages. "He sailed on the *City of Limerick* from Montreal, Friday, October 19th," he said. "That was last October."

"Well, he didn't," said Renfrew. "I have information that no such person sailed on any boat leaving Montreal on that date."

Laycroft smiled tolerantly.

"Like so much official information," he said, "yours is not founded upon a knowledge of the facts. The name of Anthony Striker will be found on the passenger list of that boat as sailing on that date. I am positive that is so."

"I didn't say his name was not on the passenger list," said Renfrew. "I merely said that he did not sail."

At that Mayflower turned upon Laycroft with a smile of dour triumph, but he was plainly mystified by Renfrew's questioning. Laycroft gestured Renfrew's remark aside.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I must confess that I did entertain a doubt as to whether he would take passage. I suppose the wretched man spent his fare to Montreal at some gin mill in Edmonton or Winnipeg. I shouldn't be surprised if he is still spending what he can beg or borrow in the same gin mill."

"I see," nodded Renfrew. "And now, Mr. Laycroft, I wonder if you can give us as clear an idea of where Victor Parandean may be?"

Laycroft gazed with irritating amusement at Mayflower.

"We have it on the best authority, that he is drowned," he murmured.

"Well, he isn't," snapped Renfrew. "Unless he succumbed to last night's rain. Victor Parandean has just made the mistake of stabbing to death Bush Tansey; and Striker is not in Winnipeg, because all that remains of him

lies on that table there." He pointed grimly to the litter of worn bones. "And now, Mr. Laycroft, I must ask you to consider yourself under arrest for complicity in the murder of both these men, and I warn you that anything you may say will be used against you." And he moved quickly to a place between Laycroft and the door as Sheehan stepped to Laycroft's side.

Laycroft, on his feet, rigid with emotion, stared at the policeman with a face the color of yellow clay.

"Have you gone mad?" he cried in a choked voice.

"I have given you warning," Renfrew reminded him.

And Laycroft, shrugging his shoulders, resumed his seat with the greatest coolness imaginable.

"Don't be afraid," he smiled. "I shan't talk enough to bore you."

Mayflower crossed the room and stood over him while Sheehan went through the man's pockets.

"I thought you couldn't last, Laycroft!" cried the factor. "I knew you were a scoundrel, and I knew you'd be shown up in the end!"

"If I ever hang, Mr. Mayflower," drawled Laycroft, "I hope it will be because I've murdered you." And then, with an unsuspected strength, he wrenched himself from Sheehan's grasp and was at the factor's throat. With a strength even more amazing, Mayflower coolly stepped back with the leap of a prize fighter and with one blow sent Laycroft sprawling into the chair again. Sheehan pinned the man down.

"Ah, well," sighed Laycroft, with murder in his eye, "you gentlemen will have to take the consequences of this outrage."

"Tell me how you found this scoundrel out!" cried Mayflower.

"I will if you will tell me first why you are so incensed

against him," said Renfrew, grinning with an irresistible amusement.

"I will," agreed Mayflower, although the malevolent tension of his face did not relax. "I have had no use for that white-fingered tailor's dummy, because the first day he came here I knew him to be a scoundrel. I knew him to be a scoundrel because he said that he was happy to meet me, and that was a downright, unsolicited lie! I've never seen the man who was happy to meet me, yet."

Renfrew gravely nodded his understanding.

"And now tell me how you found out what I could have told you when you first came here; that is, that Laycroft ought to be in jail," said Mayflower.

"To begin with," explained Renfrew, "I must admit that my best clue came from you. You told me that Striker had once been kicked severely by a mule. After I had discovered that Striker came to America and to Tawny River for no other reason than to blackmail Laycroft, I suspected that Laycroft would have liked to get rid of him. So I examined the skull and found the mark of that mule kick upon the bone in a spot which would have been behind the left ear. I felt convinced then that the bones were Striker's, and tried to bluff Laycroft into an admission of it by expressing my belief that Striker had not sailed on the boat for which Laycroft booked him passage."

"And how did you know Striker came here to blackmail him?"

"I found a letter which showed that Tansey was Striker's brother-in-law; also, Striker had been a prison guard in Reading, England. In writing to Tansey before he came over here, Striker said: 'If that man, Laycroft, is seven hundred and sixty-four, and I think he is, he will be in clover, and since I know what I know, he will be a good man to have as a neighbor.' Do you see? Seven sixty-four

could not be Laycroft's age, and would hardly be his street number ; but to a prison guard each of his wards is known, not by name, but by number. That is how Striker knew Laycroft."

"A jail bird," said Mayflower. "That's pretty."

"The rest you can see," explained Renfrew. "Striker came over with the announced intention of living on Laycroft, and Laycroft, tiring of the man's demands, booked a passage for him back to England and then put him out of the way when he refused to take it."

"But how?" asked Sheehan.

Renfrew gazed at the silent, contemptuously smiling prisoner.

"Parandeu will tell us that," he said. "And I'm thinking Parandeu won't be found many miles from the place where Laycroft lives. Parandeu is a half-wit, and Striker ill-treated him. I believe that Laycroft persuaded Parandeu to knife Striker, and, since then has protected him. That's why he didn't want it thought that Parandeu was drowned, for if he was discovered later, it would be embarrassing for him to explain why he had allowed it to be believed that the man was dead. Tansey knew that Parandeu was alive, however. As a matter of fact, Tansey probably knew a lot of things which Laycroft preferred to be kept a secret. But Tansey was honest. Tansey probably told Laycroft that he was sick of his position and planned to make a clean breast of it. So Parandeu was again called into service, and Tansey followed Striker. Am I right, Mr. Laycroft?"

"You are a fool, Mr. Renfrew," Laycroft answered loftily.

But at the trial which sent Laycroft to prison it was proven that Renfrew's deductions were terribly accurate, and admirably susceptible of proof.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### SCOTTY LEARNS TO WAIT

WHILE Renfrew untangled the affairs of Mr. Steven Laycroft at Tawny River, Scotty divided his time between the horses which excused his existence on the Ranney Ranch, and the studies which he earned by his work with the horses. Sometimes Scotty rode the prairie with Dick Ranney at his side, and sometimes he worked about the barns. Always he was with the horses, and the hours which he and Dick devoted to their studies were often spent in riding clothes; intervals between rides and the rigors of making young horses behave as they should.

It was a life he loved, and certainly no boy has ever gone to school in a happier, freer way than those two boys went to school at Scratch Rock Farm. But there was a figure missing from Scotty's life which had made a place there that nothing else could fill. And Scotty was doomed to miss the presence of Renfrew for longer than his patience would permit. The result was devastating to his studies.

"You'll have to buck up," Dick warned him. "You do any more of that mind wandering and when Renfrew gets back, you'll everlastingly wish he'd stayed away."

Scotty scowled at him sheepishly. He devoted infinite pains these days to vainly trying to conceal the fact that his mind was at Tawny River, or wherever the present adventure might have taken the first friend he had ever had.

"I'll take whatever he's got for me!" he said defiantly.

"If he'll only come back soon, or take me up to ride with him!" He brushed books and papers away from him. "Rubbish! That's all it is!" he cried.

But the fates were making Scotty's lesson a long one.

Renfrew's work was not finished with the arrest of Laycroft, for the fact remained that one Victor Parandean was in the unhappy position of a man who had committed two murders; and it is the mission of all Royal Northwest Mounted Policemen to see that men in that position do not remain at large.

"You will not have difficulty finding him," said Sheehan. "For he is the only tow-headed halfbreed in the entire western hemisphere as far as I know."

"Tow-headed?" exclaimed Renfrew, for it surprised him.

"His hair," said Sheehan, "is as white as the hair of my grandmother was before she died, God rest her soul. And moreover the man is as mad as a March hare."

They were still in the cabin of Buck Tansey, with the dead man stretched out on the cot, the bones of Anthony Striker on the table, and Mr. Steven Laycroft coolly sneering at them from the chair where he sat between them. Mr. Mayflower, the Company's factor, sat in a corner and regarded all and sundry with a sour smile.

"But it is meself will do the identification," said Sheehan. "For it is out of the question for you to chase this lunatic alone."

"It would be well if we could both go," mused Renfrew, "for there will be a good deal of hide and seek about it. But who is to look after this gentleman?" He indicated Laycroft who, beautifully clad in riding clothes, looked like a gentleman who was being kept late for a luncheon engagement by a group of social inferiors.

"You can leave him with me," piped Mr. Mayflower; and since his face looked like a dried apple which had con-

ceived an aversion for something, which something was obviously Mr. Laycroft, both policemen laughed at the sound of his voice.

"But the responsibility—" began Renfrew.

"Make me your deputy," snapped Mayflower. "You will have the bond of the Hudson's Bay Company for your prisoner's safety."

Renfrew looked at Sheehan, whose eyes were aglitter with suppressed amusement.

"Do it," said Sheehan. "Mayflower loves him too well to let him get away. And isn't it two pairs of manacles he's wearing?"

So it was done, and the two policemen left the queer, dry little factor to guard the fuming prisoner while they rode away to Mr. Laycroft's home in the forest to seek the trail of Victor Parandau.

Mr. Laycroft had given vent to a sense of humor when he set up in Tawny River as a lawyer. In reality his life in that out-of-the-way spot had been the life of a country gentleman. He had taken over an abandoned clearing on the river bank some miles from the settlement and had there occupied himself with overseeing gangs of Indians and half-breeds whom he employed to clear vast spaces of land, build log houses and tend his string of horses. Renfrew, convinced that Laycroft had concealed Parandau somewhere about this extensive estate since the date of Striker's disappearance, rode with Sheehan directly to the long, two-story log house which had been the swindler's home.

"It is a mysterious thing," said Sheehan as they jogged along the wagon road, "how a little light will clear up a large quantity of darkness."

"You mean," said Renfrew, "that you have seen brighter mornings than this?" For although the sun had been some

time in the sky the morning was scarcely lighter than dawn.

"I do not," said Sheehan. "I mean that when you explained the real nature of this gentleman, Laycroft, you also explained a thing I have never understood. You have explained why he does not tire of clearing vast areas of his land and why he keeps a string of hunters in his stable that cost more than they're worth for any purpose save running away."

Renfrew grinned. "He's a genius," he said. "Of course a high-grade hunter would give a man who knew how to ride him a head start against the best mount in the province. Although," he added, "Little Golden Locks here, can hold her own over as hard a course as she's ever likely to run." He patted affectionately the silken neck of his mare, whose tan mane which had given her her name flashed in a light cascade over her chestnut coat. "But why the clearing?" asked Renfrew suddenly.

"The better to see you with, my dear," sang out Sheehan. "He's got enough of the woods about his place cleared away by now to have seen a redcoat coming at a distance of half a mile. From the top of his house he could probably have seen us when we passed out of the settlement."

"I wonder if Parandean will know that?"

"Ah, but that's a fact, too. There will be no sight or sound of the rascal if he has a view of us before we come to the house."

Renfrew thought quickly.

"How many ways out are there?" he asked. "I mean how many trails are there can be followed on horseback?"

"Two beside this one. One down river and the trail that tails off into the woods. He wouldn't get far on that one, for it's not made for fast travel by a mounted man, but the trail down river is a rare fine trail for this part of the world."

"How can you get to it so that you can ride up to the house from that side?"

Sheehan grinned appreciatively.

"Surely," he said. "There is a ford a mile back. I'll be after crossing to the other side and running down to the lower ford which will bring me onto the trail a mile below the house. If you'll wait for me but half an hour or so we can cover both trails as we ride into Mr. Laycroft's preserves, and if the lunatic takes neither of 'em we'll run him to earth in the woods."

"Get on with you, then," cried Renfrew. "I shall wait here for thirty-five minutes by my watch. Then I shall ride down the river to Laycroft's house while you ride up to it from below. I shall meet you there. Right?"

"Right as a trivet," cried Sheehan; and swinging his horse about he went galloping back toward the ford.

Renfrew waited. He dismounted from his chestnut mare and stroked her fluffy mane of tawny hair. He led her into the shade beside the roadway as the sun rose higher with the morning, and he himself sat beneath her restless head, fingering the loose reins in his hands. He waited forty minutes and then, leading Golden Locks out to the roadway again, he mounted and began trotting forward toward his goal. He had proceeded only a few rods when a turn in the trail brought to his view a lonely man who walked with a woodsman's springy tread toward him along the road. At the sudden appearance of the redcoat the walker stopped, gazed up at Renfrew for a moment, and then drew off to the side of the trail, waiting for Renfrew to pass. Renfrew, however, drew his mare to a halt as he came up beside the man.

"Good-morning," he hailed.

"And to you, Meestair polissman," said the stranger.

Renfrew examined him closely, as becomes a policeman



who is out hunting. There is something about tall, dark-haired, black-bearded woodsmen which makes one expect them to speak with voices deep and gruff. Because this stranger was of good size, clad in black shirt and rough corduroys, bearded with thick black hair and capped with a tangled ebony mat, Renfrew was surprised at the mildness of his gentle tenor voice. He sought the man's eyes, and again he was surprised. The swarthy woodsman had the clear blue eyes of a little child, and with them he stared up at Renfrew with an unblinking, friendly intentness.

"Going up to town?" asked Renfrew cheerfully.

The man smiled and shook his head.

"You go for de veesit?" he responded.

"I'm calling on Mr. Laycroft," grinned Renfrew.

The translucent blue eyes traveled to the fair mane of Golden Locks.

"Dat ees a mos' pretty 'orse," said the mild, soft voice.

Renfrew found the man's unaffected manner and his childlike friendliness very attractive.

"Yes," he said. "Her name's Golden Locks. You say you are not going to town?"

The man shook his head.

"Lak de storee. Golden Locks an' de Tree Bear. Dat ees a mos' varee pretty storee, Meestair polissman," he said gravely.

Again Renfrew nodded.

"I wonder if you could find time to guide me to Mr. Laycroft's place," he invited. "I'm a stranger here."

But the man became suddenly shy. Like a child embarrassed by the overtures of a stranger he drew off to the side of the trail with a smile which at once apologized and confided.

"I mus' get to my traps," he murmured. "Dere ees wan beeg woolf dat I am after. To-day I get dat beeg woolf,

sure." He shook his head vigorously to indicate his perfect confidence, and then, with a shy smile over his shoulder, he dog-trotted up the trail. Renfrew bade him farewell and sat watching until the strange man disappeared at the bend of the trail around which Renfrew had just ridden. Then he turned Golden Locks and trotted to the bend. To his surprise the man had disappeared.

"H'm," muttered Renfrew. "Cut into the woods. That's queer."

He turned and resumed his journey down the river. The blue eyes of the black-bearded trapper remained in his mind while he rode, and, as will happen to a man whose mind is occupied, he found himself emerging from the forest into the clearing of Steven Laycroft before he suspected that he had reached it.

"He certainly did clear enough of it!" he reflected, as he gazed upon the rolling stump-strewn fields of the great expanse of land which Laycroft had cleared. It all stretched away to woods which seemed dwarfed because of the distance to which their boundary had been removed; many patches of the cleared space had been cultivated, and here and there the marks of some trail worn by the passage of Laycroft's lumber wagons could be discerned. Fences were pine stumps neatly arranged in lines, and, in the distance, the odd corners and roof lines of log houses were visible lying, half concealed, among the uneven contours of the naked land.

"That," reasoned Renfrew, with his eye upon a roof point which aspired above all other buildings which he saw, "that will be Laycroft's house. Wonder if Parandeu knows the jig is up. Wonder if he's within fifty miles of here." And so on until he rode up to the two-story log dwelling which had been Mr. Laycroft's retreat and found Sheehan waiting for him outside the door.

Sheehan's ride had been as profitless as Renfrew's, so that the two policemen now knew no more regarding the whereabouts of Victor Parandean than they had known when they left the settlement excepting for the single fact that the man they sought had not escaped in either direction by the river trail. They entered the house, were greeted by a squat Indian woman who, without further opposition than a troubled frown, permitted them to make free of the erstwhile home of Steven Laycroft. A search of the lower floor revealed nothing of value, and a tour of the floor above gave them nothing more interesting than a series of neatly groomed bedrooms until, at the extreme northwestern corner of the second floor, a door opened which gave them entrance to what had obviously been Laycroft's private study. With a grin of satisfaction the two men set about their examination.

They had not carried their examination very far—Sheehan was ransacking a chest which stood across a window, and Renfrew, at the desk, was thoughtfully fingering a bottle which looked as though it contained ink but didn't—when Sheehan, glancing through the window, gave voice to the wonder which the scene aroused in him.

"Now what can that breed be doing with the horse? Exercising it, would he be?"

Renfrew looked up very quickly and, gazing over Sheehan's shoulder, was in time to see his black-bearded friend, the "wolf" hunter, scramble astride of an immensely tall, raw-boned hunter which danced on its long legs like a black demon against the dull green of the clearing about him. Renfrew grabbed Sheehan by the shoulder as they saw the rider crouch low over the horse's neck and urge it to a gallop.

"Not exercising it," he cried. "Not with a rifle under his

## *RENFREW RIDES AGAIN*

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arm! Quick, Sheehan! What color are Parandean's eyes?"

"Blue they are!" cried Sheehan. "Like a little child's!"

"I knew it!" snapped Renfrew. "What a fool I am! That's Parandean himself on the hunter. He's using Laycroft's own get-a-way to escape us. Come on!"

## CHAPTER XXXV

### WILD RIDING

**T**HE two policemen crashed down the stairs of Laycroft's house in three mighty bounds, and in an astonishingly few more were at their horses. Renfrew was mounted in a vault and Golden Locks, feeling the spur and the reins held high, feeling as well the spirit of her rider, was off as her sires had been off times without number in many an Old World steeplechase.

From the start she left Sheehan's sturdy bay far behind.

From the start, too, Victor Parandean had little to fear from the hunting if he used his horse properly, for while Golden Locks was as fine a mount as could be picked up for the work Renfrew desired of her, Laycroft's black hunter was a thoroughbred, trained to leave far behind his clean black heels the finest racing blood of an empire. He ran with long and easy strides, always appearing to have in reserve such an effort as Golden Locks made from the start. But Golden Locks and her rider were as one, and the halfbreed was pulling at the big black's mouth. Parandean was hanging on by the reins, not happy in his high place with the sight of the earth speeding dizzily beneath him, and the black horse, fighting that hold, ran with his head in check, not freely. Renfrew, noticing this, gave Golden Locks freer rein, and the chestnut mare surged forward as dammed water will surge when the barrier breaks away. Renfrew unbuttoned the holster of his revolver.

Now when Parandean had, all unawares, run into Renfrew on the river trail, he had taken alarm, and the fear of



fiends was not greater in his simple heart than his fear of the red-coated Mounted Police. The excuse of the "beeg woolf" hunt had given him the chance to beat back through the woods to that place where he knew his only safety lay—to the stables where was kept the fastest means of travel in all the province. He had not known that the police were in the house at the very time when he was saddling the biggest of Laycroft's horses, but now, with those hunters of the law hard upon his tail, Parandeu was game. He knew that this black demon beneath him needed no clean-cut trail. He knew that fence and hedgerow were playthings to the animal's great heart, and although his heart quaked at the danger of his high, precarious seat, it quaked more horribly at the thought of the redcoat close behind him. So, as the black hunter entered a field which was hedged with pine stumps, roots aloft, Parandeu turned his mount abruptly from the trail and headed him across the field, directly at the high, rude fence.

Renfrew saw his quarry's aim at once, and without hesitation, followed him. Parandeu, who had confidently expected his pursuer to ride around the field perforce, saw him follow, and breathed a frantic prayer. As the great horse plunged like the wind at the barrier of pine stumps Parandeu closed his eyes and screamed with fear. When he opened them he was again on the earth with the barrier behind him, and he turned his head just in time to see the scarlet figure of Renfrew, balanced superbly upon that "mos' pretty 'orse," soar over the pine stumps with the grace of a centaur. Parandeu shrieked curses and beat the black hunter's flank with the barrel of his rifle. The black hunter threw up his head and plunged forward with the fury of a northern gale.

Renfrew had not known that Golden Locks could clear a barrier as high as those pine stumps had been, and he had

not been blind to the very fair chances of himself and his horse being impaled on the sharp lances which the roots thrust into the air. But a man cannot give up before such a chance as that, and since Golden Locks had had the heart to make that jump, it was not in Renfrew to refuse it. And now he rode forward with a new confidence, seeing his quarry already within his grasp, for it was not in reason that Parandeu would try any obstacle greater than that last one. Sheehan was left behind, and Golden Locks was puffing heavily from her exertions, but the clearing had its limitations, and the black demon could not pass them. Parandeu swung away at a right angle, and Renfrew, grinning, put Golden Locks across a little brook which she took in her stride, and cut across to the new line Parandeu had set. Again Parandeu turned, this time away from the galloping redcoat, and the green clearing whirled about the riders like a carrousel as Renfrew turned to follow. Parandeu made for the wooden fence line and cleared the rails with room to spare. Golden Locks, hard behind him, took off to a slippery footing and knocked the top bar down. Renfrew thanked his stars that the rail had been loose.

"If it had stood fast, I had been under you, milady," he murmured, and pulled up sharply to cut Parandeu off on a new turn he was making. Then he grinned. This looked like the end, for Parandeu, seeing the blank wall of the forest close before him, had turned to skirt the clearing. On his left, now, was the river fringed with a rocky ledge; beyond that the forest; no thoroughfare in that direction. Behind him was Renfrew, and ahead of him and a little to the right was the mounted figure of Sheehan riding toward them at full gallop, his scarlet coat shining in the distance.

For a moment it appeared as though the frantic halfbreed

was going to turn dead right and race it out with Renfrew across the broken clearing—a race which must have ended with two exhausted horses in the proximity of the house—but, even as he pulled at the black's head, he appeared to change his mind, and with an extraordinary cry he put all his strength into a jerk of the reins which brought the hunter about so sharply to the left that Parandean was nearly hurled from his seat. Thus Renfrew saw his quarry head his speeding horse directly at a wall of rock full six feet high—and he knew that beyond it lay the river.

Gamely Renfrew followed, but there was no question in his mind as to whether the jump might bring disaster, for he knew that Golden Locks could never make it. Indeed, he regarded the hunt as ended, for he felt sure the black would refuse that rocky wall; and he loosened his revolver where it hung. But straight at the piled flint went the gallant black. For an instant Renfrew's heart almost stood still in doubt and admiration as he saw the great horse plunge at the barrier, and then it soared at the beauty of what followed as the black himself soared from the earth and neatly, deftly cleared the rock. There followed a flat, resounding splash, and Renfrew turned his mare from her course even while she gathered herself to spurn the impossible jump, and went thundering along the ledge until he reached a breach which permitted him to pass. Without pausing he dashed Golden Locks into the waters of the river and, with the water about his ankles, looked upstream in time to see Parandean scrambling to the opposite shore. The black hunter stood against the near bank and shivered.

"Up and over!" cried Sheehan from above. "Sure an' it's the Grand National itself he ought to be running. Where is he?"

He came to Renfrew's side with a great splashing and

laughed at the sight of Parandeu, even as he raised his revolver.

"Sure he's a pretty sight! What's the black on his face for? Stick up your hands and surrender!" All this he cried out in one breath.

"It's hair dye," said Renfrew. "I've got the bottle in my pocket. Come on across." For Parandeu had stood for a moment with the black dye running in streaks down his face and his tow-colored hair gleaming through the black—he had stood for a moment laughing at them and then, clutching his rifle to his bosom, he ran up the bank like a black streak.

The two redcoats ran their horses to the opposite shore and then hurried up to the spot where Parandeu had landed, but by the time they arrived there Parandeu had vanished. Renfrew saw at once where the man had taken refuge, and, without waiting followed him.

On the side of the river opposite that stone ledge which Parandeu had cleared on his black hunter the woods had been burned away on an upward slope so that an ugly black semicircle of cleared ground swept back to a rise which was overgrown with thick underbrush. This thickly clad hill-top appeared impenetrable, but into it Parandeu had disappeared and Renfrew very rightly considered that into it he and Sheehan might as easily disappear in their pursuit. Renfrew had noticed from the point of vantage which his own approach to the river had given him that the other side of this wooded hill joined the river in a precipitous fall of rock, and he advised Sheehan according to that evidence.

"I shall hunt him into those woods," he said; and his voice vibrated with the certain knowledge that they had their quarry cornered. "Why don't you ride down the other side of the river until you command the cliff at the back of this hill? I'll probably chase him out on that side and if you take pot shots at him he will run back into my arms. Or, if

## *RENFREW RIDES AGAIN*

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you like, take him yourself ; he's nobody's property until we get the cuffs on his wrists."

Sheehan hesitated doubtfully as Renfrew started up the hill, then, aware that team play was, in this game, of the first importance, he turned back to his horse and did as Renfrew had suggested,



## CHAPTER XXXVI

### MR. MAYFLOWER ASSISTS

THE fact that Parandean, whom Renfrew was to arrest for the murder of two men, had with him a rifle which was in all probability loaded for a use as desperate as that to which the halfbreed had put the black horse, did not deter Renfrew in his passage across the incline of cleared land which approached the hilltop; but it did give him an unpleasant feeling that at any moment the impact of a bullet in his body might cause him never to hear the sound of the shot that sent it. Caution, however, was of no use to him, and to dash without dignity up that incline would have rather excited the half-witted fugitive, who probably watched his advance from the concealment of the thicket than have given the redcoat protection. So Renfrew walked up the slope with brisk resolution and did battle with an impulse to place his hand on the butt of his revolver. That would have been a mistake which might have instantly drawn the halfbreed's fire, but to a man walking into the face of death it was a great temptation.

Renfrew gained the thicket without drawing fire and sank to earth with a feeling of vast relief as soon as he found himself immersed in the thick foliage. For a moment he lay there and listened. No sound reached him save the noises of the forest and the creatures familiar to it. He looked about him keenly, seeking some clue to what way the fugitive had taken, and while he looked he heard a faint and very brief click, as though a metal object had touched rock. Moving as quietly as human body could, Renfrew edged in

the direction of that sound. With infinite pains, slowly, choosing carefully each place he laid his hand, each spot into which he pulled his body, Renfrew wriggled forward. Suddenly he heard a faint hissing sound. It was very close to him and it sounded as though one who had held his breath was letting it out carefully, with lips wide open. Stealthily Renfrew reached for his revolver and prepared to spring. Even as he did so something hard touched his throat just where it met the shoulder, and the dense foliage in front of his face parted. The hard object at his throat was the muzzle of a high-powered rifle, and, framed by the parted foliage, was the smiling face of Parandeu with his childlike eyes screwed up in such a fiendish grimace as one can only see in the eyes of a passionate man who possesses the controlling mind of a child.

For a moment Renfrew lay there, rigid, staring into the murderer's eyes, feeling the touch of the rifle against his jugular vein; then, with a sudden movement Parandeu was gone. He leaped away with the abrupt movement of a startled hare, and the thick foliage engulfed him as completely as though he plunged into murky water. Immediately Renfrew leaped to his feet and dashed backward toward the cleared slope. It was in his mind that Parandeu must not be allowed to double back. While they had him in that thicket, they had him at bay. Renfrew crashed through the underbrush with this in mind, and, as he moved a rifle was fired in the thicket, and a bullet whined close to his ear. He dropped immediately to the earth, and, immediately, the rifle was fired again. This time the bullet struck the ground at Renfrew's side, nicking the cloth of his tunic, and he knew that Parandeu could see the scarlet of his uniform. He moved with a pounce, as becomes a man who is a target for a dead shot at close range, and the next bullet missed him by a foot.

It was now Renfrew's turn to call retreat, and he did so while he bore in mind the important fact that he must keep the cleared slope in view. He moved quickly, in short dashes, taking cover where he could. Frequent shots from various directions told him when he was exposed to the halfbreed's view, and informed him, too, that Parandeu was striving to get to the cleared ground before Renfrew's vision and revolver could command it.

Then Renfrew found himself in a hollow with decayed branches making a rampart about him, and a mossy log to his right over which he could view the open sweep of the burnt-over slope down to the bank of the river. The rifle had been silent for a space, and Renfrew grinned with the knowledge that, to Parandeu, he had completely disappeared. He watched the clearing, and fingered his revolver as he did so.

In a moment his expectations were realized. At the edge of the thicket, some distance from Renfrew's place of concealment, a dark form slipped forth, and cunningly keeping close to the cover of the woods, began to skirt the clearing, working around it toward the river. Renfrew watched for a little while, and then, as the halfbreed approached his objective, the redcoat changed his position. He endeavored to do it silently and invisibly, but Parandeu must have had uncanny sight or hearing, for he dived into the woods even while Renfrew glided, crouching, down the fringe of the forest, and the redcoat had barely time to fling himself to earth before the inevitable bullet came whining through the space where his breast had been. Now Renfrew fired, more with the thought of assuring Sheehan that he was still in the land of the living than with any thought of injuring his quarry. But the shots had the effect of silencing Parandeu's gun, and giving Renfrew a period of watching once again.

The performance was repeated. Again the halfbreed tried for the river's edge. Again Renfrew changed his position. But this time he managed to get nearer the river bank on his side of the semicircular clearing before Parandau brought his gun to bear. Then they repeated the maneuver once more with the result that Renfrew gained a rockbound vantage point directly on the river bank at one edge of the clearing and poor Parandau was marooned high up the slope on his side, confronted with the choice of trying to make the river bank by stealth or retreating again to the wood-covered hilltop. Then Sheehan took the first choice from him.

Sheehan, hearing the firing and interpreting Renfrew's shots as a call for help, had ridden around the bend in the river and passed the open clearing behind the wall of rock which bound that bank of the river which was opposite the burnt-out clearing. Parandau had seen him ride by and tried to wing him as he galloped past, but he missed, and now Sheehan was across the river covering the clearing in such a manner as to make Parandau's position a point in an uncomfortable triangle.

And in this manner Renfrew and Sheehan found themselves in precisely the same predicament as they had shared when first Renfrew essayed to climb the slope. Parandau was at bay, but the scarlet coats of his pursuers made it problematical if they could get to him before his bullets reached them. Renfrew decided that a parley with Sheehan was in order, and he conducted it across the open space which lay between them.

"This seems to call for a sacrifice hit!" he cried. "The question is, which of us is going to be hit?"

"Explain yourself, me dear Holmes," responded Sheehan.

"We can rush him," explained Renfrew. "And it's not

likely he'd wing more than one of us. How do you feel about being winged this morning?"

"Reluctant!" answered Sheehan without the slightest hesitation.

"Our two minds have but a single thought," yelled Renfrew.

"When does the advance begin?" cried Sheehan.

"Use your head and keep an eye on me," advised Renfrew; for he had no desire to warn Parandeu of their coming.

"I'm wishin' you luck, old boy!" cried Sheehan.

"Again we click!" cried Renfrew. "Let's hope his ammunition's low."

"Don't be foolish," cried a sharp tenor voice from the other side of the river. "If you young men will come here I'll show you a pretty toy."

It was the voice of Mr. Mayflower, the factor of the Hudson's Bay Company at Tawny River, and it spoke from behind the stone ledge which walled the bank opposite Renfrew's concealment.

"Not now," yelled Renfrew.

"Yes, now!" cried Mr. Mayflower. "It will save your sacrifice hit."

That sounded interesting, and Renfrew decided to investigate it. With infinite care he beat back from the clearing along the river bank and crossed the stream without apparently betraying his retreat. Crawling along the opposite bank he soon came to the ledge, and crawled along with the rock ledge between him and the opposite bank whereon the halfbreed was concealed, until he came to the angle where Mr. Mayflower now sat with Sheehan beside him and played with a large and brilliantly colored jumping-jack. Renfrew squatted there in the dust and wetness and stared with sur-



prise at the gravity with which the two men regarded this toy.

"What have you done with Laycroft?" he whispered; for Mayflower indicated with a sign that he had no wish to share their words with Parandeu.

"Left him with the four men of the settlement who like him least," he said dryly. "They will not let him go."

"And why this unmanly relaxation?" asked Renfrew, pointing to the jumping-jack.

"I laid in five of them a year ago last Christmas for the children," explained Mayflower. "But I could not sell this one and another because they were too big and cost too much. However, the other big one sold, and it sold because Victor Parandeu fell in love with it. It has a great fascination for him. Do you see?"

"I think so," said Renfrew. "But tell us some more. It is an amusing story."

"We will stick this toy up on the wall," explained Mayflower, "where Parandeu will see it. Then you two gentlemen will gather up your courage and ride back to the house in such a manner that he will see your scarlet backs and perhaps put a bullet in them—those are the fortunes of war. I do not think he will, for the toy will hold his attention."

"And what then?" demanded Sheehan.

"The rest you leave to me, although I suggest that you do not go so far but that you can see what happens in your absence."

Thus it was that two members of His Majesty's Royal Northwest Mounted Police were seen to turn their backs upon a fugitive whom they were sworn to run down. Renfrew and Sheehan got their horses and rode away until they had turned about the side of a rise of ground which concealed them from the hill where Parandeu in his screening foliage sat watching them. A fence of pine stumps was

laid along the top of this rise behind which the policemen had disappeared, and it was to their own private side of this fence that they crawled after they had made fast their horses in the hollow below. Thus, seeing without being seen, they watched Mr. Mayflower as he crouched behind the ledge of rock and worked the strings that made the absurd toy dance to the sight of Parandeu as though it were grotesquely hailing him from the top of the ledge.

It was some time before Parandeu emerged from his hiding, but when he did so he came very directly down the slope, albeit he moved slowly, as a naughty boy might move who seeks to take a toy that is not his own. Down the slope, however, he came, and then disappeared from sight as he took to the river. The two watchers next saw him when he arose above the ledge of rock. They saw him rise like a swimmer rising above the bulwark of a vessel. They saw him throw his rifle over the ledge before him, and they saw Mr. Mayflower pull the rifle over to him and sit on it. They saw Parandeu clamber down to Mr. Mayflower's side, and then saw him as he pleaded with Mr. Mayflower for the toy. Mr. Mayflower, however, continued to industriously work it.

Afterward Mr. Mayflower told them how he had refused to let Parandeu have the jumping-jack but had finally granted his plea that he might work it. Then, after Parandeu had worked the toy for some time, Mayflower had pointed out that he must be getting home to dinner. Parandeu had pleaded to be allowed to carry the toy, and Mayflower had promised to let him carry it half way to Tawny River.

Thus the two policemen finally saw the factor and the malefactor coming toward them side by side, each jealously watching the toy. And when they had strolled down the hill at Mayflower's beckoning, and Parandeu had tried to run away—the rifle having been left, forgotten, at the ledge

—they soon won him over completely by insisting with threats and harsh language that Mayflower give up the toy to him. So Parandeu, with the toy in his hands, accompanied them happily to Tawny River, since they permitted him to keep his jumping-jack in his arms the while.

Renfrew could now start for home. Before night he and Sheehan were on their way down the river, taking their prisoner with them. Laycroft would come later, after some weeks in a jail which Mr. Mayflower kept for him.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE BRILLIANT IDEA OF MR. HAWLEY

THREE men sat about a little fire which threw a flickering light upon the trees that rose like pillars about them. Their encampment was on the bank of a river, and the heavy boat which occasionally caught a flicker of the firelight showed that they had traveled through swift waters. Two of the men, who sat well away from the fire and leaned luxuriously back against a mossy log, were clad in uniforms adorned with glittering brasses and shining leather work; the third man was dressed in the dark clothing of a woodsman which set off his mop of fair hair and his flaxen beard in a startling blotch of light. His blue eyes twinkled happily as he sat there near the light of the fire, and he played with a brilliantly painted wooden doll while the two uniformed men chatted with their eyes upon him.

"That creature," said Constable Sheehan of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, "is a born idiot. His mind has not developed since he was six years old, and he is perfectly happy to be arrested for murder so long as he can play with his jumping-jack. Is it not so?"

"It is so," admitted Constable Renfrew, who was the other uniformed member of the party. "But I cannot see how it proves anything regarding the peculiarities of people who are sane."

"That is because you are of a talkative nature and will not observe that thoughtful silence which is so admirable in the perfect listener," answered Sheehan with mild reproof.

"What I said was just be the way of leading you up to my point."

"Lead on," said Renfrew apologetically. "I shall not interrupt again."

He arose and crossed to that side of the fire where sat Victor Parandean, whom they were conducting as a prisoner to Edmonton. Gravely he took the prisoner's arm and pulled him gently but firmly away from the fire which had already caused the foolish fellow's boots to smoke; then, his prisoner's comfort assured, he rejoined Sheehan at his place before the mossy log.

"Elaborate your theme," he urged.

"I was saying that there is no telling how a human being may behave under peculiar circumstances," said Sheehan patiently.

"You were," agreed Renfrew.

"And that Parandean was born an idiot," continued Sheehan.

"Exactly," Renfrew admitted.

"All of which was be way of leading up to me point," observed Sheehan. "And that is, that even the poor lunatic yonder would never have committed such an idiotic action as was the action whereby I distinguished meself in the first job I ever had to do for the police." He regarded Renfrew for a moment with great severity before he continued. "You will endeavor to control yourself in all matters which arouse your curiosity if, in me good nature, I beguile the evening with the story of it?" he demanded.

"I shall not so much as breathe above a whisper," promised Renfrew.

Then ye should know [Sheehan began] that the first post to be given the honor of me presence was the post of His Majesty's Northwest Mounted Police at Meadows, Alberta.



I see that ye smile, for you know that Meadows is nothing more than a railroad camp and a playground for such benighted seekers after variety in matters of landscape as the Canadian Pacific Railway Company calls tourists. There is a grand hotel at Meadows where if you have eight dollars a day to spend for a room and ten dollars a day to spend for board ye may enjoy such fine hospitality as is dispensed in Buckingham Palace and on ocean liners. If ye want to have a room in the Glacier House at Meadows, Alberta, and have not got the eighteen dollars in ye're pocket, ye must either wash dishes or belong to the Mounted Police.

I had a room there, for I was a member of the police just graduated from the headquarters school at Regina, and it was me duty to greet all incoming tourists and see that they did not venture into the mountains without proper escort and provisions; it was also me duty to uphold law and order in the railroad camp in the hollow; to arrest all the foreigners who got drunk and disorderly on Saturday nights, and to see that none of your criminal element came to live among the poor creatures and take advantage of them. You will believe more or not as you choose when I tell you that this part of me duty was most costly in the damage it did to me uniforms, for the poor, defenseless track walkers had a way of being grand and rough with me when me duty made it necessary to protect them from gamblers and dealers in such paint-removing liquids as they called whisky.

It was for this reason that I kept in me room at the Glacier House a fine, retailored set of clothing which I would put upon me superbly modeled figure—did you promise not to interrupt, or did ye not?—which I put upon me superbly modeled figure for the purpose of meeting the trains in the summer time and escorting the beautiful tourist ladies from the station to the hotel. It was also me duty to play tennis—and to answer questions on the perils of a policeman's life.

Well, what more could a lad of twenty-two ask for? There was grand fighting to be had in the railroad camp, and there was fine society at the hotel which properly appreciated the beauty of a superbly modeled form clad in well tailored regimentals.

If ye have finally swallowed whatever it is that ye've been biting of more than ye seem able to chew [Sheehan continued], let me tell you that one fine August afternoon there climbed down from the train at Meadows Station a man who at once commanded the attention of all. This was because he carried in his hand a traveling bag which he was unable to manipulate without causing infinite regret to the many passengers who he kept hitting with it. It was meself who ran to his side and took it from him, for it was so heavy that it made him stagger; and I am not insisting that you believe me when I tell you that it weighed not less than eighty pounds. I told him so.

"This bag," says I, "weighs not less than eighty pounds. What's in it, if I may make bold to ask?"

"A camera," says he.

"A camera?" says I, swingin' it in me hand as if it had been a feather. "Is it a life-size picture of the mountain ye're after?" For I did not believe him.

He looked at me very quickly, and his hard, bright eyes, which looked like black marbles, snapped in a peculiar way.

"You do not believe it?" he asks. And I was honest with him.

"I do not," I says.

"Then ye will do me the kindness to put it down," says he.

I put the bag upon the ground right where we stood, midway betwixt the railway station and the Glacier Hotel. Then you may call me a liar and take the consequences if he did not bend over it, open it up, and lift out with a great exertion of strength, the biggest and heaviest camera that I have

ever seen. It was a cruel hard camera, that camera was, and it had about it all kinds of queer gadgets such as might more fittingly be stuck about the outside of a traveling crane. But for all that it appeared to be constructed of sheet steel and looked like the conning tower of a submarine boat, a camera it was, and all the nobility in me fine, generous nature called upon me to apologize. I did so.

"I thought you was lying," I says. "And now I see that you were not. Let us say no more about it."

"You are right," he says. "You were wrong."

"And what kind of a camera may you call that, if I may make so bold?" says I, accepting his explanation with magnanimity.

"It is a moving-picture camera," says he.

"Is it possible?" says I; for you must understand that in those days the great Northwest had not been discovered by the movies, and no one had yet invented the Mounted Policemen which may now be seen upon the screen to the enjoyment of every one who likes to see strange and impossible creatures.

He assured me that it was indade possible. He stood upon the wooden pavement out there in front of the hotel and became very excited and enthusiastic as he told me about the wonders of the cinematographic camera, and what he had come out into the mountains to do with it.

"I shall carry into the lives of every dweller in the stifling cities," he says, "such a panorama of God's great Out-of-Doors as will make the walls of their city prison-houses vanish and bring new life into the weary hearts of the multitude," he says. And, "They will see the great glaciers as they move slowly to the valleys, and the waters of life arise in the valleys to move swiftly to the sea. They will see the majestic aisles of the forests, and, through the enfoliated glory of God's own cathedrals they will see the dawn burst

like thunder over a hushed world. They will see the kingly moose, the ponderous bear and the tranquil eagle as he wafts his winged flight from peak to peak."

"Will they see the mosquitoes?" says I, killing six of them which had lit on the back of his neck.

"Why did you hit me?" he cries with quick anger.

"It was the mosquitoes," says I; for I had used the flat of me hand.

"They are pests," says he. "But you needn't have hit so hard."

"I agree with you," says I. "They are pests."

So I carried his eighty-pound camera up to the hotel for him, and he was duly grateful, although his bright black eyes regarded me with a good deal of suspicion, as though he knew not whether I was treating him as seriously as his mission in life demanded. I did not take the five dollars which he offered me because I felt that I could have paid him that much meself and still owed him for the mosquitoes but I appreciated his generosity none the less, and was properly repentant for the rude, clownish humor which his foolish conversation had inspired in me. After I arranged his guides and his pack train for a trip into what he called Nature's own cathedral, I thought I had heard the last of him, but that was not to be.

Three days later he came to me where I stood in the stable grooming me horses for a visit I was expecting from the inspector of me district. He informed me without delicacy that two days and two nights in Nature's own cathedral had been more than sufficient for him for the reason that cranking a motion-picture camera does not prepare the human frame for traversing mountain trails in a Mexican saddle.

"But I have an idea," he says. "Why did she do that?"

"She does not like to feel the lighted end of a cigar against her flank," says I with some heat, for at the same

time as she kicked out at him, the mare I was grooming had thrown me against the side of her stall. "Get outside the door and I will listen to the idea you were speaking of."

Not being used to horses, he was somewhat upset by the feel of a mare's hoof against his shin bone, but after I had persuaded him how lucky he was to have escaped a broken leg, he stopped dancing and gathered his wits together.

"You are a fine looking man, Inspector Sheehan," says he.

"Call me Constable," says I. "I am not a proud man."

"Constable Sheehan, then," says he. "It makes no difference. You are a fine appearing man, Constable Sheehan, and the force should be proud of you."

"It should," says I, gratified at this appreciation of me obvious virtues. "What else?"

"It would be a good thing for the Dominion of Canada, for the grrreat American public and for the world in general," says he, "if the moving pictures could show how the Mounted Police do their work."

"Faith," says I, "you'll have to come back to the stable, then. But put out that cigar."

"I do not refer to the worrk of grooming horses and all such ordinary jobs," he says. "The worrk I have reference to is such noble and romantic worrk as ye do when ye fight your way through these confounded mountains and get your man."

"Get our what?" says I. For in those days, you will remember, the words had not yet been invented.

"Your man!" he cries with his black eyes sparkling be virtue of his enthusiasm. "The man you are after. I mean when you make your arrest!"

"Ah, is that it? But who am I going to arrest? Is it having me arrest the first man I meet you'd have me doing, just so that you can make moving pictures of it?"

"No," says he—and since his name was Hawley, it's by



that title I shall refer to him hereafter—and he drew up close to me, packing his words down my throat. “Listen to this. I have thought out a fine story which I would have you act for me. I shall take pictures with my camera showing you as you sit in your orderly room—”

“I have none,” says I.

“We’ll fake it,” says Hawley. “And you will receive orders to track down a man of desperate nature who is wanted for shooting an inspector of the police. I will then show you making ready for the trail. I will show you tracking your man down. I will show you struggling with him when he resists, and, lastly, I shall show you placing him under arrest. Then, in a log cabin in the wilderness you will be seen sitting before the fire with a revolver on the table before you and the prisoner in manacles opposite. You are making your report.

“‘I have tracked Black Pete to the end of his trail,’ you are writing. ‘And,’ you write, ‘I got my man.’

“In this manner the public will see how the Royal Northwest Mounted Police stretch forth the long arm of the law through the northern wilderness; and you are the man to do it, for you are a fine figure of a policeman, Corporal Sheehan.”

“I am a Constable, only,” I reminded him. “But aside from the fact that ye have a civilian’s dream of what we do for a living, and that if ye had the job of nursing a black spalpeen of a wall-eyed horse for so much as an afternoon your dream would turn to dust. I think that your idea is very bright and pretty. But the man who can tell you whether it is within the duties of a Constable of the force to pose for moving pictures is the man who comes here tomorrow to see that I have all my buttons polished and that none of the track walkers have suffered from my neglect of their welfare. Before I do any such romantic thing as track

## *BRILLIANT IDEA OF MR. HAWLEY*

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down and arrest your desperate murderer, Mr. Hawley, I must have the pairmission of the district inspector."

With which he returned to the black wilderness of the Glacier Hotel where I upheld the dignity of the law, and I returned to me job of currycombing an ungrateful mare.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### MR. SHEEHAN FIGHTS A FIGHT

**T**O me amazement [said Constable Sheehan] the inspector had no complaints to make when he visited me in the morning, and to me further amazement he embraced the opportunity of putting the force into moving pictures with open arms.

"It will redound to the credit of the force, Sheehan," he said. "And it will be a good thing for the district. You may coöperate with Mr. Hawley to the best of your ability providing that nothing you do interferes with the pursuit of your regular duties. See that he puts into the picture nothing that will reflect upon the force, and in all occasions act like a gentleman."

"Faith, sir, I shall do my best," says I.

Hawley did not see the inspector, the inspector being forced to travel upon his tour of inspection without delay, and Hawley being engaged upon what he described as "location," but which seemed to me nothing less than an effort to find the greatest possible wilderness in the least possible distance from the lounge of the Glacier Hotel. When he met me in the dining room of the hotel that evening, however, the news of my ability to act for him aroused such enthusiasm in his simple breast that he was out and away on horseback before breakfast in the morning, to find a fit place for what he called the great fight scene.

The man further showed such great activity in pursuance of this crazy scheme that I found meself with never a mo-

ment to do more than walk about in front of his camera and change the expression of me face according to his commands. The black mare also acted; but you will understand that she was not the kind to stand still while a man fondled her ebony brow in an effort to register "a policeman's love for his faithful horse is proverbial"; and the result was that she lifted me off the ground with me arms about her neck and carried me through Mr. Hawley and the place where the camera had been before that gentleman had time to get out of her way. It was on that occasion that Mr. Hawley won me awe-inspired respect as the finest plain and fancy swearer I have heard before or since in this country or on the ould sod. But the camera, being cased in steel, was not damaged.

We got through the scenes in "the orderly room" by virtue of using the railroad station as scenery and a colored boy from the hotel kitchen as a faithful Indian scout. The scenes showing me as I leapt to arms and sallied forth to the hunt on me faithful mare had to be retaken because the faithful mare decided to balk when I mounted her, and she stood like a log of wood in the stable door until Hawley left the camera, when she buck jumped out of the scene in a style which would have been the making of any wild western picture that's ever been shown.

The scenes in which I fought the perils of the mountain trails were only slightly marred be the fact that I lost me temper at the remarks of some shallow-headed young tenderfeet who sat in an automobile beside the road and proved themselves unable to appreciate fine acting at the point when I tore me trousers on a rock slide; and me lone battle with a mountain torrent went off grand, saving for the small matter that the water was deeper than I thought, and me unable to swim. Hawley thought me struggles were so realistic that he could not leave his camera and I was like to

have drowned entirely had it not been that I gave up the unequal struggle and found me feet touching bottom.

After those scenes were over it became necessary to enlist some reënforcements in the way of a man to play the parrt of the desperate criminal, for you will understand that, while me acting was such as to be an honor to the forrce and a credit to me country, it was not in me nature to pose as a desperate criminal and arrest meself for shooting an inspector.

For this parrt of inspired murderer, then, Mr. Hawley looked about him and found a queer, harrrd looking man who had ridden into Meadows with a pack horse while we were battling with the elements a few rods from the kitchen garden of the Glacier House. This individual rejoiced in the name of Reginald Gilhooly, and he was difficult to look at. He was not tall, but then he was not, on the contrary, shorrt. He had a cast in his eye which gave him a shifty look, and a lantern jaw which gave him a villainous look. He was dressed in such clothes as a cowboy out of a job would wear, and it was obvious that he used them for pajamas. Desperate enough he looked to have murdered a half dozen inspectors, and in addition to that he had a fine vanity. Hawley spotted him immediately when we rode into the back of the hotel after our day's work one evening.

"Will ye act the parrt of a desperate criminal for the moving pictures I'm taking?" asks Hawley without preliminary talk.

"I will," says Gilhooly. "How much is it worth?"

"Three dollars a day and board," says Hawley.

"They gave me five when I rode for the Continental Films in California," says Gilhooly.

"Three dollars is what I said," snaps Hawley. "Take it or leave it. Me friend here worrks for nothing."



"I'll lose money," says Gilhooly, for all the worrld as if his name was Levy. "But I'll do it," he says.

So off I goes to me room to examine me day's mail and see that the law and order of the land was not suffering through me neglect. Hawley did not show up at dinner that night, for he had taken Gilhooly with him to act out some scenes which he would have to do without me own experienced acting to be an example for him. In the mornnin' comes Hawley to me room with me not yet dressed.

"Put on ye're oldest clothes," says he. "For to-day is the day of the big fight scene." Which filled me with justifiable pleasure, for it was the scene I had been waiting for.

We firrst went out along the railroad where the pass is wide enough to give the only long-distance view you can get within fifty miles of Meadows without shinning up the face of a mountain. Hawley set up his camera beside the railroad tracks, and it was the parrt of Gilhooly and meself to chase each other along the broken trail that followed the river along the foot of the mountains on that side of the stream which is opposite the railway tracks. In this way, ye understand, the arrtful Mr. Hawley was able to picture a wilderness as wild as any in the hemisphere without stepping foot off the right of way.

Firrst he would take a long shot of Gilhooly as he rode furtively along the trail off into the distant vistas of Nature's own cathedral. Then it was a close-up of meself, as I scuttled about rocks and waded torrents on the back of me horrse. Then it was of meself close to the eye of the camera, with the furrtive Gilhooly in the distance. Then a close-up of Gilhooly taking a tumble from his horrse, which he threw with great neatness and made to lie still by kicking him on the ear. At that I was incensed, for I do not like to see the likes of Gilhooly take such liberties with horrse flesh; but Hawley persuaded me to let the man be and ride back

along the trail to the spot from which I was to approach at a mad gallop.

Gilhooly, meanwhile, was to register great desperation and take pot shots at my approaching form from behind a rock, which he did with great enthusiasm after forgetting to load his rifle with blanks. As a result the big fight scene was a great success, for one of his bullets skidded along the left flank of me black devil of a horrse, and she, recalling the lighted cigar, and by the same token, having little use for moving pictures of any sort or description, reared up in great fury, lost her footing, and sent me flying galley west. I landed on top of Gilhooly, who dropped his rifle and grabbed me in a firm embrace which was not affectionate.

Hawley yelled, "Fine!" and cranked his camera like a lunatic.

"Fine, is it?" yells I, and I took Gilhooly into me two hands with all me Irish up.

"Go aisy!" he squeaks, and I saw that he was yellow with fear.

"Aisy, is it?" says I, starting to throw him about.

"That's fine and realistic!" yells Hawley; whereupon Gilhooly bites me ear. With that, realism passed all bounds. I picked up the miserable creature in me two hands.

"Ye scut!" says I, and flings him into the river. He crawls up on his feet and glares up at me with black murder in his eyes, the while he chooses a rock to do the job with.

"Drop that rock!" yells I, and with great enthusiasm I jumps him from the bank.

"Howly murder!" he yells as he goes down, and out of the corner of me unbitten ear I hears Hawley crying out like a voice in the night.

"For heaven's sake!" he yells. "For heaven's sake!"

I had Gilhooly under the water by then, and he was getting fairly limp, so I brought him up and spoke sternly to him.

"Was it shooting at an officer of the crown, you were?" I demanded.

"Shootin'?" he whimpers. "No."

"Then was it a breath of wind that hit me horrs in the flank?" I cries, not losing me sense of humor.

Then he looks astonished and highly upset, so that me good hearrrt was touched by the sight of his face.

"Oh, my goodness!" he whimpers, using other words which I will spare your ears the hearing of. "Oh, my heavens on earth," or words to that effect. "I clean forgot to load that rifle with blanks." And I paused in the act of slaying that man entirely because the look of his face was pathetic, and because Hawley came scrambling across the rocks of the river and, waist deep in the water, endeavored to pull me away from him. I yielded to the man's efforts, for the matter was laughable, and we all went back to the hotel again.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### CONSTABLE SHEEHAN STARS

“**I**T was a lucky thing that he forgot the blanks,” explained Hawley to me, who might have been drilled clean by virtue of the mistake. “For it made that fight a Jimdandy. I believe I got every move you made.”

“You are a fool, Mr. Hawley,” says I. “But in one thing you are right entirely. It was a great fight.”

“To-night,” says he, “we will take the final scenes.”

“Faith,” says I. “Is your camera a kind that takes pictures in the darkness?”

“No,” says Hawley. “But the last scenes are interiors, and they have let me fix up some lights in the hotel lobby.”

“The lobby!” I cries, the wind taken out of me sails. “The lobby! It is not having me act out this foolishness in the public glare of a hotel lobby, you’d be?”

“Ah, but it will not embarrass ye,” he says, reassuring. “I am going to use the stone fireplace in the log cabin hallway. You will sit at a table with your gun in front of you, and Gilhooly will be in manacles opposite. That’s when you make your report.”

“It is, is it?” I says. “Well, you’re wrong. It is not. What will the inspector say when he hears of such a public misuse of the uniform I’m wearing?”

“He has already given his approval,” says this amazing creature. “I have been sending him photographs of every scene we’ve taken, and I have told him about my plans for to-night. He has written me a letter. He is highly pleased with the things we have done and offers only one criticism:

that is concerning the fact that your uniform was minus a button in the scene where you slid down the rock slide."

I groaned, remembering that button and how much of my hide had come off with it.

"You will show me that letter," says I. "And if it is so, we will do as you say."

He showed me the letter, and it was. So I went up to me room with the intention of arraying meself for the great scene, and found there the mail which was awaiting me. The firrst thing I opens is a notice which reads in the style you know so well yourself.

"Peter Hawkins," it reads, "is wanted for felonious assault." And so on and so forth. But the description of the man was scanty. "He is a dark man with prominent black eyes," says the notice. "And has been connected with the motion-picture business. There is no picture to be had of him, but you will search your district for a stranger answering this description."

And there it was.

"This," says I, "breaks up the party. For it is obvious that I must spend this evening combing the railroad camps for this criminal. It is not within the bounds of me duty to pose for movies while this man is at large. I shall tell Hawley as much."

And of course that brings to me mind that Hawley, being in the motion-picture business himself, might know something of this gentleman who I am looking for. . . . No, do not interrupt me. Have I not told you that no idiot with the mind of a six-year-old would have acted as I did?

So I took me story to Hawley, and I have never seen a man's face fall as his face did fall when I told him of that notice from headquarters. "If you know such a man," says I, "you will please tell me of him, for I am instructed to send any information to Inspector Drew at Banff who can



identify the criminal." And then, seeing his face fall: "Faith," says I, "you look as if it might be you that was wanted." With that he grins a sickly grin.

"No," says he. "It is my plans for to-night that makes me feel hard hit. I have arranged the lights and I must leave this town before morning. Now be a good fellow, Constable Sheehan, and see this thing through before you go out after this man. He is probably not within a hundred miles of here, and it will do no harm to wait until the morning, or, if it comes to that, you can go to the railway camp after we've finished with the scenes."

Well, that sounded reasonable enough, for if the man I wanted was in Meadows, and that was not probable, he would be there just as surely, thought I, after the scenes were over and Hawley had taken his train. So I relented out of the goodness of me heart, and promised to make the scenes.

It all took place in the lobby of the Glacier Hotel, as Hawley had inforromed me, and I am telling you that he had arranged the furniture fine to be sure. There was a huge big arclight in the fireplace and it was artfully screened so that it would shine upon a wooden table which was placed to one side of the hearthstone. On the other side of the hearth was a soap box. Such lights as I had never before witnessed were placed back far enough from the fireplace to leave us a stage for our action, and beside the lights Mr. Hawley had his camera. The lobby behind that camera was filled with chairs, such as you would be after seeing in the swell parlors of the idle rich with all the nice tourist people lolling in them for all the worrld as though meself, Constable Sheehan of the Mounted Police, was there for no other reason than to put on a vaudywill act.

Still, I could see no reason why I should skulk in the background, so I took up me position well to the front and saw

to it that the force was in evidence what time Hawley tried to take the limelight with his mysterious camera doings. Finally he called me to his side and from a dark corner behind the light there emerged Mr. Gilhooly who did not have to be made up for his part. The fight of the afternoon had left him marked almost as badly as the black mare was, and in a much more conspicuous place, you will understand. This, in combination with the natural geography of his face, gave him as murderous a look as any desperate criminal might need to impress his desperation on such an audience as sat before us, and I heard the nice tourist ladies gasp when they set eyes upon him.

"Now then, Mr. Sheehan," says Hawley, as he moves a chair up to the table, "will you put a pair of manacles upon Mr. Gilhooly's wrists, and we will be starting."

"Mr. Gilhooly," say I with a smile, "permit me to lend you these handcuffs." I heard the nice tourist ladies titter at the wit which came out of me mouth, and Gilhooly looks at me with murder in his eyes as I snapped the manacles about his wrists.

Then we began to act. Me with the gun on the table, sat there with the light of the fire flickering on me face and the queer great lights behind the camera burned at me back most tremendous. Gilhooly sat crouched in front of the fire with his hands manacled before him and looked up at me like an offended baboon, and Hawley yelled out his instructions to me as he cranked the wheels of his camera. I should say that we rehearsed it all first, but there was little to do saving sit there and exchange glances of mutual animosity while I wrote out the report which Hawley took by rolling the camera up behind me shoulder as he cranked it. So the rehearsal was short, and Hawley soon had the lights out and me exercising me genius to the tune of the clicking wheels that made the film go round.

He was in a great hurry, for he said that he must catch the train that would be leaving in thirty minutes or so, and it seemed to me that he was queerly nervous into the bargain. But we didn't keep him long, for Gilhooly was brooding over me rough handiwork of the afternoon, and it was no trouble for him to sneer out his vicious remarks while he sat there in handcuffs and I wrote of how I had got me man. It was soon over, and I heard Hawley yell as much.

"Lights!" he cried; and the house electrician turned the lights up in the room. The nice tourist ladies applauded and I got up from me table to smile according and likewise bow me appreciation. Gilhooly got up, too, from his soap box and came over to stand in front of me, obviously waiting for the manacles to be removed. But I was recalling the deep feeling which he had put into the remarks he had sneered upon me during the scene, and it came to me that I could now repay the fine mistake he had made in loading his rifle with ball and spilling me from the black mare.

"You can wait," says I cheerily, and I turned away to help Hawley pack up his camera and film.

"If I hurry," says he, "I can catch that train."

"You will catch it," says I, "for am I not here to assist you?" And I busily made meself useful with his contraptions. With swear words Gilhooly planted himself in front of me.

"Take off these damn bracelets!" cries he.

"Did you not hear the gentleman say he was in a hurry?" I asks him mildly, and I carried the camera over to where the case stood, pretending that Gilhooly was not there. He was beside himself with rage, and he told me about it with great varieties of expression.

"If you do not speak softly," says I, "you may keep them on for the night on account of blasphemous language in a public place constituting a violation of the public acts."

I snapped the camera case shut and joined Hawley where he wrestled with another case that contained many appurtenances of his queer pastime.

"Where are your bags?" says I, for the train was whistling as it rounded the curve beyond the station.

"At the station!" he puffs. And I gave him the coöperation of the force in the matter of bringing his traveling case to a successful closing.

"Good-by," says he. "I shall be back to see you."

"I shall walk to the station with you," says I.

"Not by a long shot!" squeals the villain of the movies. "You'll stay here and take off these bracelets!"

"You hear him?" says I to Hawley, for me heart was touched. And I told Hawley good-by then and there. In a cloud of hand baggage and porters he disappeared through the entrance like a wind-blown leaf; it was the last I saw of him. Then I turned to Gilhooly.

"You are a very impatient man," I reproved him.

He made some remarks which did not redound to his credit or tell the truth about meself.

"That is not a way to make friends," I told him.

"Friends or no friends," says he, "if you take these manacles off I'll hit you in the eye."

"Oh no," says I, not losing me sense of dignity. "Not in front of all these nice lady tourists." For they stood in a group at the door and were shocked by his language. "We will go outside," says I.

"Outside or in," he squeals, "I tell you once and for all, take off these bracelets or I'll swing for you!"

"Outside it is, then," says I soothingly. "Come on, at the double quick, please." And I marched him toward the door.

As he started reluctantly to obey me I heard the bell and whistle of the train pulling out, and as we emerged from the

door of the hotel with the lady guests close behind us, for you will understand, they desired to miss no opportunity for being shocked, there comes bounding up the steps the tall form of Inspector Drew and Constable Whitney from Banff station.

"Ah, congratulations, Constable Sheehan," says he. "I see you have taken him."

"Taken who?" says I, for I was much perturbed at the realization that meself and Gilhooly would not fight that night.

"The man, Hawkins," says the inspector, and turns to the pale ghost of Gilhooly at me side. "You are under arrest, Hawkins, for felonious assault," says he. "And I congratulate you, Sheehan. You have got your man. It will be a leg up for you in the force."

"It was no more than me duty, Inspector," says I. "And what is more, the poor creature played into me hands."

The inspector told me afterward of how he had received the pictures from Hawley showing Gilhooly in the scenes that were taken before the occasion of the big fight scene. The inspector identified him at once and immediately proceeded to Meadows for the purpose of arresting him. But, of course, I had done the deed firrst.

That, you will admit, was good police worrk, Mr. Renfrew; but you will also admit that as an example of feeble-minded lunacy, my failure to identify this man, Gilhooly, is not to be equaled by such as Victor Parandean.

Renfrew was aware, as Sheehan finished his story, that the big Irishman was regarding him with a twinkle in his eyes that belied the severity of his countenance as clearly as it betrayed a mischievous interest in Renfrew's answer to his challenge.

"I don't know," said Renfrew magnanimously. "I con-



fess that in my own mind I thought the criminal would prove to be Mr. Hawley, the moving-picture man of ideas."

Sheehan grinned broadly.

"Is that a fact?" he cried. "But you will admit that the effort of this man Gilhooly to disable me by an accidental shot of his rifle was at least suspicious, will you not?"

"Yes," said Renfrew generously. "It was at least suspicious. And now I guess we'll have to cover our infant up with his blankets, for he apparently found your story too deep to keep him awake."

"You are wrong," said Sheehan. "It is merely another proof that the mentally lacking are wiser than we fine, sane men of superior intelligence. While we are telling stories for the satisfaction of our own conceit, and listening to prove that we are polite, he, in his wisdom, uses the night for sleep."

## CHAPTER XL

### BACK TO THE MIDNIGHT OIL

THE homesickness of Scott McLeod—for that word best describes the longing which he felt to ride with Renfrew into what adventures he was having—was ameliorated in a peculiar way by the departure of Staff Sergeant Deming. The sergeant left Sagrinay with such abruptness that Scotty knew nothing of his going until he drove into the settlement one night to get the latest report of his absent friend, and found the police post locked and vacant. Dick Ranney, who had accompanied him, had a silent companion for the journey home.

"It may mean," said Dick, as they ascended the ranch house steps together, "it may mean that Renfrew's coming back."

Scotty stood still and stared at him.

"You know, Dick," he said, "you've been a darned good pal to me."

"What d'you mean?" mumbled Dick uncomfortably.

"Why, if you'd been anything but that, you'd have told me weeks ago that I've been acting up like a baby and a fool. A fine friend I've been to Douglas Renfrew, fretting down here like an unweaned colt, while he's plugging away at his job in the belief that I'm plugging away at mine. I'm going to cut that out right now. If Renfrew came back to-day and told me he was leaving again in the morning, I'd say good-by to him with a smile."

"That's the stuff!" cried Dick, immensely pleased at this alteration in his friend's mood. "We'll just hit the midnight

oil like a pair of searchlights and be all set for a holiday when Renfrew gets back!"

And Scotty plunged into a new period of happiness, two nights and a day without a suspicion that his resolution was to be tested almost in the making of it.

After the second night had gone, it was ordained that Dick and Scotty ride through Sagrinay with a string of horses. They passed the police post at a slow trot, and immediately brought up short in a cloud of dust when they saw that the building was occupied. They hitched their horses and entered the post as one man. In the orderly room, by the desk, stood Renfrew, an open letter in his hand.

"Renfrew!" cried Scotty, and he bounded forward.

Renfrew grabbed him so that they met as two opposing men might meet in a football game. They stood there and stared at each other. Then Renfrew turned to Dick.

"I just rode in ten minutes ago!" said Renfrew. "Lord, it's good to see you!"

Scotty pounded him upon the back.

"We're going to have a holiday!" he cried. "We'll ride together!"

Renfrew frowned.

"No," he said. And picked up the letter he had been reading. "No holiday. Not yet, old man. No holiday for either of us yet. I'm off on the trail again to-night."

Scotty stood rigid. He was tragic with consternation. Then he met the eyes of Dick Ranney, and read their message instantly. He smiled.

"What is it?" he faltered.

Renfrew handed him the letter.

"John Barto, wanted for the murder of Desmond Lyfe, committed in your district May 3rd, 1910, is reported to be working in the mines at Ledbitter, British Columbia," read the letter.

Scotty glanced up at Renfrew, and, catching his eye, quickly and bravely smiled. Then he turned immediately to the letter again.

"You will proceed to that place immediately upon receiving proper papers of authority," it continued. "These papers will be delivered to you by Staff Sergeant Deming in person. Staff Sergeant Deming should arrive at your post soon after the delivery of these instructions."

Scotty put the paper down upon the table. He sighed.

"Then you'll be going off again to-night?" he questioned feebly.

"Yes. To-night," said Renfrew.

Scotty again caught Dick Ranney's eye. Immediately he pulled himself together, looked up at Renfrew and smiled.

"We've got to go," he said. "Got to get those horses back before lunch." His eyes dropped. He felt unhappy. With a sudden revolt he turned upon his friend, and drew his breath in sharply.

"You won't . . ." He stopped short. He had been on the point of mutiny. He had almost surrendered to a fierce passion against sitting at childish studies while Renfrew went out to dangerous adventure. But he read his mistake in Renfrew's eyes. Renfrew was trusting him to do his part.

"You won't take chances!" he cried instead. "Barto's a . . . You'll be careful!"

Renfrew smiled at him quietly.

"Yes," he said. "I'll be careful."

Then Scotty was happy again. It was a happiness which had come out of his victory over that moment of revolt.

"Then, good-by!" he said. "When you get back, we'll have earned the right to a holiday!"

"Good-by, old man," said Renfrew. And to Dick he said, "Good-by, old man. When I get back, I'll take a holiday, too."

And they left him, to take the horses back. To ride silently side by side, each with his string of frisking horses. Scotty rode with the smile still frozen upon his face, and he gave no hint of what was behind his smile until they were passing the gully where Dick had been hurled into the discovery of Murdock's hiding place. At this point, Scotty, still smiling, betrayed himself with a remark which neither of them ever referred to again.

"If Barto shows fight," said Scotty, with a queer serenity, "the chances are we shall never see Renfrew again."



## CHAPTER XLI

### LEDBITTER GETS A MAN WITH SAND

“**J**OHN BARTO, wanted for the murder of Desmond Lyfe, committed in your district May 3rd, 1910, is reported to be working in the mines at Ledbitter, British Columbia.”

Thus read the orders which sent Renfrew once more away from Sagrinay, and they continued, “You will proceed to that place immediately upon receiving proper papers of authority. These papers will be delivered to you by Staff Sergeant Deming in person. Staff Sergeant Deming should arrive at your post soon after the arrival of these instructions.”

And sure enough, Staff Sergeant Deming came galloping up to the post in the station buckboard almost before Renfrew had scanned his orders for a second time.

“Ah, you’ve got it!” cried Deming, as soon as his greetings were over. “I’ve some papers for you in my pocket, and I’m to take over the post while you’re gone.”

“Righto!” said Renfrew, thinking quickly. “If you’ll pardon my haste, I’ll be catching the seven-fourteen out of Starnes and get the night train west at the main line. There’s nothing here to worry you except Fallwether’s pigs and Jimmy Marmalade’s grandmother. The pigs have cholera, and Fallwether’s got to destroy them. Jimmy Marmalade, who is a Cree with no sense of responsibility, has got to be made to contribute to the old lady who lives in a tar-paper shack because Jimmy can’t keep a home by whittling willow whistles. Try saying that quickly.”

"I'll practice it while you're gone. But before you go, I've some fatherly advice to give you. What do you know about Ledbitter?"

"Only that it's a town in British Columbia with a name that makes me laugh."

"Good. Now listen to these words of wisdom, or the name of that town may never make you laugh again. Ledbitter is a bad town. The sheriff there is rotten, and he makes a great graft out of letting the miners do anything they like from playing faro to shooting one another full of little holes. He plays in with the lawless element, which is why Barto went there.

"Now Barto may be a giant, and stronger than six men. I helped you tackle him once, and I know. But all headquarters is interested in is that he is a murderer, and that he has twice escaped the police. I am instructed to warn you that the Commissioner will not be lenient if Barto escapes this time. Headquarters feels that we've got him, and that if you deal carefully with the local authorities at Ledbitter, there is no chance of his getting away. I'm telling you all this because I happen to know that with conditions at Ledbitter what they are, the chances are really all against you."

"Hm," Renfrew was thoughtful. "Sounds like an invitation to a party."

"Yes. Or to a funeral. Anyway, I made it as clear as possible to the Commissioner, but he won't send more than one man because it would be bad for the prestige of the force. But I did get his permission for you to proceed to Ledbitter in plain clothes, study the situation there, and get in touch with the local authorities before any one knows there's a Mountie in town. That's all I've got to say, but Renfrew, me boy, let me assure you that our friend the Commissioner means business."

"And so do I," said Renfrew. "I am now going upstairs to put on a suit of plain clothes."

So it was that Renfrew came to Ledbitter; and so it was that he came in plain clothes.

Now, since the first small company of Mounted Police rode out into the Northwest fifty years ago, taking law and order into the wilderness and justice into remote, untrodden places, the criminal of Northwestern Canada has never had occasion to lose a profound respect for the scarlet coat. A man of the Mounted Police never draws his gun until he is fired upon, because it is expected that no man will be rash enough to fire upon that bright red uniform. Your Canadian criminal seldom fails to live up to this expectation. The red coat is greater than the man who wears it. It stands for all society. It stands for the law.

But without his red coat upon his shoulders, your Mounted Policeman is not more than any other man. In plain clothes he becomes merely an individual, and if he wears those plain clothes in a province which is outside the jurisdiction of the Mounted Police he is an individual without authority. Upon this fact and upon one other hangs the point of Renfrew's dealings with "Putty" Brendel. The other fact is that Putty Brendel was no respecter of individuals, and had only contempt for authority. At the time of this story he was a resident in the town of Ledbitter, British Columbia, because the only thing in the world which he really respected was the scarlet coat of the Mounted Police which Renfrew, on this occasion, was not wearing. In this manner Putty had the opportunity to experience the results of a proposition he had often made when outside the jurisdiction of the Mounted.

"Just let 'em take off that uniform!" Putty had often boasted. "Let me meet one of 'em man to man, and they won't interfere with me more than once. Just once, that's

all. Underneath them scarlet coats they're just as yellow as the stripe down their pants!"

And Putty's friends and allies, and victims, too, would sagely wag their heads and agree with him. But Putty never let a redcoat come near enough to him to see what the real color of his skin might be. Renfrew would probably never have had the pleasure of his acquaintance had he not been obliged in the course of duty to go outside police territory and visit Putty in his haunts clad only in plain clothes.

He arrived in the town in the middle of the night, and discovered to his surprise that there was every opportunity for beginning his investigation then and there, since the main section of the town was still wide awake. He went to the hotel, and, entering the smoke-filled, crowded lobby, set about getting a room. The somber young man at the desk assigned him a bed and then examined Renfrew sharply.

"We want cash in advance," he said. "Every day."

Renfrew grinned.

"I'm good," he said. "Why the anxiety?"

The clerk scowled at him bitterly.

"This is a live town," he said, and Renfrew detected a sneer in his voice. "People ain't always as rich in the morning as they are the night before."

"That sounds like a conundrum," observed Renfrew pleasantly. "What's the answer?"

"The answer is," said the clerk, "that your room will cost you seventy-five cents, payable in advance."

Renfrew grinned and paid it. Thereupon his suitcase was taken by an elderly man who was the bellboy for the Garland House at Ledbitter, and Renfrew followed the stooped figure upstairs after vainly trying to take the bag away from him. After he had entered the dingy room to which he had been assigned, he tipped the ancient bellboy. But the ancient bellboy did not leave the room. He stood in the

doorway and emitted a chuckling sound which Renfrew quickly identified as a laugh.

"Charlie don't feel so good," said the bellboy, and Renfrew divined that he was speaking of the embittered clerk downstairs. "Charlie got trimmed last night." And the old man chuckled irresistibly. "That's why he was so short with you."

"Not so rich in the morning as he was the night before, eh?" said Renfrew.

"You're right, mister. An' what's more there ain't hardly anybody in this town nowadays who is."

"Why? What's the trouble?"

"Brendel." The old man chuckled again. He seemed to find something irresistibly humorous in the plight of his fellow townsmen. "Putty Brendel they call him, because of the color an' disposition of his face. Putty's set up as nice a gamblin' joint as you'll find in all this here country. I've been in Mexico an' I've been in Alaska, so I know. But I know something more than that, too." He threw back his head, opened his mouth and chuckled uproariously.

"You seem to be a pretty knowing old man," encouraged Renfrew.

The old man became at once serious. He regarded Renfrew with the eyes of a disillusioned owl.

"That's me," he said. "I know that Putty Brendel is swindling every fool mining man in this town. He's the kind who packs more aces up his sleeve than you'll find in the hands he deals you in a month of Sundays, and Charlie downstairs ain't the only one who can't send the rent money home to his old mother this week-end."

Renfrew looked thoughtful.

"What's the sheriff doing?" he asked. This looked as though he might get some of the facts he wanted before he went to bed that night. His remark had the effect of throw-



ing the old man into such a fit of chuckling that he had to collapse in the rocking chair.

"The sheriff!" he spluttered. "The sheriff! That's good, that is! That's rich! Say, mister, I ain't tellin' you anything but what everybody in the province, I guess, knows already, when I tell you that Mint Oblinger, which is the sheriff, just brought Putty Brendel to this town so he could pay up his share in the Burden Mine. That's what Mint's business is. Brendel, he's made every dirt miner in this town crazy over his gamblin', and Mint gets a rake-off on every dollar one of the boys loses to Putty's game." Then suddenly the chuckle was replaced by a cloud of apprehension. "Say!" he cried. "You ain't goin' to tell any of the boys or anybody what thoughts I been tellin' you of?"

"No," promised Renfrew quickly. "The graveyard's a town crier compared to me."

"That's good," murmured the ancient. "The fellows wouldn't do nothin' but get mad an' violent at any abuse of Putty Brendel. The crazy fools think he's bringin' them prosperity by takin' all their savin's away from them." And he carried his thin chuckle away with him down the dim and stuffy hallway.

When Renfrew came downstairs again he found that Ledbitter had not yet gone to bed. In the dim yellow recesses of the hotel lobby a group of men were gathered about a table, talking earnestly while they made thicker the cloud of smoke which filled the air. Renfrew nodded to the clerk who, drooping over the desk, regarded the distant group with great bitterness, and then quietly strolled to the huddled conclave.

The group was made up of working men—miners, guessed Renfrew—and it was centered about a tall, handsome fellow whose dark mustache and high cheek bones gave his visage a strength and distinction which marked him as a leader

among these men. This gentleman had on the table before him a large sheet of paper upon which was neatly drawn a graphic chart of the kind generally used to illustrate statistical information. It was all dips and rises, so that it looked like the outline drawing of a mountain range. On the margins of the chart were many figures, and the tall man seemed to be explaining these figures.

"You see," he was saying, "all you fellows that get scared by losing money over at Brendel's are suffering from just ignorance. This chart shows just what I've won and lost over the last two months of play, and you'll see that when you take an average I've come out on the whole a winner. You don't want to quit while the line's going down. If you just keep on playing, it's sure to go up again. In the last two months I've made more than four hundred dollars, but that's because I keep right on playing the game. I don't stop for a minute more than I can help."

At that there was a great wagging of heads. In the group about the tall man were several who had lost all their savings and some who had borrowed upon future earnings to feed Putty Brendel's games of chance, but this method of scientific playing reassured them. They had been worrying lest they had been gambling too much; and now it was proved to them that all their troubles were due to the fact that they had not gambled enough. The group broke up with many sage remarks upon the science of gambling, and most of the workers left the lobby to follow the tall man to Brendel's palace of chance.

Renfrew, with a thoughtful quirk about the corners of his mouth, strolled up to the desk. Charlie, the somber clerk, still drooped over his counter.

"Who's the tall scientist?" asked Renfrew, as he lit his pipe.

Charlie grinned morosely.

"That's a guy who has more luck than a snake has scales," he said. "Jake Laurens is his name. He's foreman over at the Burden Mine."

"Hm." It was a species of laugh. "Good friend of Brendel's, isn't he?"

Charlie gazed at his questioner very closely; he was obviously trying to appraise him.

"Well, now," he said, "I only jus' thought to-day that Jake Laurens and Brendel are pretty thick. That's funny, ain't it?"

"Yes," owned Renfrew. "I wonder you didn't think of it at least two months ago."

"Well, now, you don't mean that they might be in cahoots?"

"Is that something else that's occurred to you?"

Charlie did not reply until he had looked furtively about the lobby. Then he leaned far over his counter and whispered fearfully his suspicions.

"Don't tell nobody," he pleaded. "Don't let it go no further than just between you an' me. But I believe"—his voice quavered pitifully—"I believe they're all in cahoots. Brendel, Jake an' Mint Oblinger, the sheriff. They're all in cahoots to swindle us out of all we got an' all we can earn!" In a singular note of despair his voice wailed up from a whisper to a cry.

"An' there ain't no way of stoppin' it. They got us all fooled so that we don't know any way to get our money back than to play an' play an' play! Lord knows what will happen to us all!" And he sank down upon a stool behind the desk, a pitiable object of despair.

"Buck up!" snapped Renfrew. "There must be some way out."

Charlie looked up at him, his face distorted with a snarl.

"What way?" he cried. "Show me a way! I got to send money home. Got to! I got to, see! Or they starve—my

mother. She starves. An' there's others like it. With wives an' children, an' homes. All we got now is debts, and the only way to get it back is to play an' play!"

Renfrew stood for a moment quiet. When he spoke his voice had a hard, clear ring in it, which had a magical effect upon the youth behind the counter.

"Young feller," said Renfrew, "you've all been hooked by this crowd of gamblers because they pretended to show you a way to get something for nothing. If there had been a single strong man among you, he would have shown you that the bait they used was nothing more than that—bait. There's only one way to get out of this mess, and that way is a man's way. You've got to realize that the game is fixed against you, call your losses by the right name, which is just money wasted by fools, and then work like men to make them up."

Charlie laughed bitterly.

"That's good," he sneered. "That sounds like a stranger all right. Do you suppose that if there was one man with sand enough to tell the world that Brendel was crooked, he'd have kept goin' so long as he has? All you're sayin' is that we need a man with sand, with grit, with backbone, and that's just what we haven't got."

Renfrew gazed down upon the distracted youth for a moment with a little smile gathering about the corners of his mouth.

"Well," he said finally, "you've got one now." And turning away from the counter, he walked out of the hotel.

## CHAPTER XLII

### THE SHERIFF OF LEDBITTER

PUTTY BRENDEL saw Renfrew for the first time in his life when Renfrew entered the doors of Brendel's Palace of Chance some five minutes after leaving the disconsolate Charlie. It was Brendel's carefully acquired habit to see immediately the entrance of every comer to his lair, and he looked up from his cards when Renfrew entered to see a man who instantly gave him a sense of uneasiness. For Renfrew looked honest, intelligent, fearless and strong, which was a combination of traits with which Brendel and his kind could never contend.

Renfrew, for his part, stood coolly within the doorway of the place and studied the men and the situation which he found there. Brendel's place was a large square room without ornament or decoration. It was dimly lit with shaded electric lights which fought a losing battle with a blue cloud of smoke. At a large table at one end of the room Mr. Peter Connors, Brendel's lieutenant, dealt faro, and at two round tables which flanked the room on either side of the doorway Brendel himself and "Scout" Wertheimer, another lieutenant, played poker with all comers who would buy his chips, while at sundry small tables along the walls smaller groups drank amber fluids and talked in strained voices.

Renfrew stood just inside the doorway and regarded all this for some minutes. Then, after exchanging straight glances with all three gamblers, he coolly strolled forward, stood behind a player who was betting at the faro table, and stared intently at the dealer. In a little while Connors, un-



easily conscious of Renfrew's gaze, scowled slightly in his direction. Renfrew gave him a reassuring smile and passed on to Wertheimer's little game. Mr. Wertheimer, who was fat and jolly in his employment, grinned up at the newcomer and waved a fat hand toward a temporarily vacant chair at his side. Renfrew shook his head and merely stood watching. A man at his side then tried to persuade him to sit in at the game.

"Come on, young feller, show your money," urged the tempter; and Renfrew, turning toward him with a smile, recognized the handsome face of Jake Laurens.

"Not to-night," he said. "I'm just watching."

"May as well make your money work," laughed Laurens. "Me, I've made a big killing these last two months. It's a great chance to turn over some easy money." And he rattled the change in his pocket.

Renfrew tossed his head with a grin.

"Wait'll I've seen something of the game," he said. "Then I'll show you some fireworks."

He wandered over to the table where Brendel sat, and stood behind a chair directly opposite the gambler. Brendel, he noticed, had not been badly named. His long face was the color of putty, and his nose, which was crooked, gave all the appearance of having been badly molded from that material. His teeth were bad, and his eyes were almost colorless, so that his face had the total effect of a queer, expressionless mask. Renfrew watched him for some time, and, knowing clearly what it was he was watching for, his gaze had a penetrating keenness. Brendel felt it, and soon became distracted from his game. Fingering his cards, he kept glancing furtively toward Renfrew until all the men about the table became conscious of the young man's presence, and a current of suspense filled the room, causing the voices of the gamblers to become hushed.

Suddenly Brendel slapped his cards face down upon the table.

"Young feller!" he cried. "Do you want to talk to me?" And he immediately became furious because he knew that he had been taken off guard, betrayed into a position of a man who is challenged.

Renfrew smiled reassuringly across to him.

"No," he said.

Brendel picked up his cards again.

The putty-colored face of Brendel stared at him. The pale, fishlike eyes glared balefully. Renfrew stood at ease and smiled. Brendel tried to meet that smile, but felt himself losing ground. He was conscious that he had invited a challenge from this cool young man which he was completely incapable of meeting with anything more potent than bluster and bluff; and Renfrew looked like a man who would be impervious to bluff. A gust of rage swept through Brendel's head as he found himself incapable of holding Renfrew's smiling but unwavering eyes. He slammed his fist down upon the table, and swore vilely. Then, mastering himself, he smothered his voice so that it became deeply monotonous.

"I don't like the way you act," he said in that deadly monotone. "You get out of this place, young feller, or take the consequences."

To his amazement and great relief, Renfrew obeyed him.

"I was just going," he said, and he strolled from the room into the black streets of the town.

When he again entered the dingy portals of the Garland House he found Charlie in a rocking chair gazing darkly into an empty fireplace.

"How long will Brendel's place be open?" Renfrew asked abruptly.

The youth leaped to his feet and stared up at him in astonishment.

"Where you been?" he cried. "I been worrying about what you said. If you tell 'em that I—"

"Answer my question," said Renfrew firmly.

"Till morning, or till the last one's been trimmed. Now tell me where you been."

"At Brendel's place. I wanted to make sure you were right. You are. That crowd is crooked as they make 'em. I just came back here to get the man."

"What man?"

"The man who has the grit, the sand, the backbone to go down there and tell 'em that they're crooked so that all the room will hear him."

"Who is he?"

"You."

Charlie ducked away as though Renfrew had struck him with his fist.

"No!" he cried. "Lord, no. Not me. They'd kill me!"

"You can't live forever." Renfrew gazed at the youngster intently. "You know the thing that got you into this scrape, Charlie?" he said.

"But I can't," whined the youth.

"Cowardice. Weakness. You didn't have the sand to resist the idea of gambling for easy money. Now, you might get out of this fix. I might let you have some money myself to put you right. But that wouldn't help. You'd still be as weak as ever, and you'd soon fall into some other hole. What you need is backbone, and for God's sake take advantage of this opportunity to get it."

Charlie reared up at that and a glint of anger brought life and courage into his eyes.

"You mean I'm yellow?" he cried.

"No. I mean you act as if you are. Weakness, that's all."

"Well, you're a liar. There isn't anybody can call me yellow and get away with it."

"That's better. Now you're talking like a man. All you've got to do now is prove your point."

"What point?"

"That I can't call you yellow and get away with it. If you're not yellow you'll come down to Brendel's with me and tell him in the loudest voice you've got that his game is crooked."

Again fear dulled the courage in the young man's eyes.

"They'd lynch me," he whispered.

"No, they won't. They'll make you prove it. And if you can prove it you'll be the everlasting hero of this town. What's more you'll have proved to yourself that you've got a backbone."

"But how can I prove the game's crooked?"

"Leave that to me. I'll be right beside you at the start, and I'll be right beside you at the finish. Are you game?"

Charlie eyed him doubtfully.

"No!" cried Renfrew. "You're yellow!"

A dark flush rushed to the other's cheek, again the spirit illumined his eyes.

"Not by a jugful!" he cried thickly. "I'm game!"

"Come on!" Renfrew strode for the door.

"But I got to have a gun!"

"No, you haven't. Come on!" The youngster caught up with him in the doorway, and grasped Renfrew's arm. They seemed to be brothers going forth to meet adventure, and the younger brother was not sure of himself at all.

"I have enough for two," said Renfrew reassuringly. "That is, in the way of guns."

The chips were still clicking, the voices of the men still hummed, when these two strange companions walked into Brendel's Palace of Pleasure. Renfrew stood for an instant

in the doorway and whispered a hurried word of instruction to the tense youth at his side.

"Right up to his face," he whispered. "And remember that you are a man with a backbone."

But Charlie needed no urging, for he had been preparing himself for this moment ever since he had first seized Renfrew's arm. He was now at a high tension of nervous resolution, and he hurried down the middle of the room with quick, hypnotized steps which brought him to the chair back opposite Brendel before Renfrew could work his way to Brendel's side as he had planned to do.

Charlie's high tension was so charged with electric energy that it seemed to suffuse the entire room. As he strode up to Brendel's table a hush spread upon the players. The chips ceased to click, the hum of voices ceased, and like a contagion, there spread to every man the impulse to turn and gaze at the excited youth. Brendel, first to feel the disturbance, stared up at Charlie with his fishlike eyes, and sensing at once that the young man was about to make a scene, his hand slipped almost undiscernibly beneath the table. Renfrew marked that movement and edged closer to the gambler's side.

"Brendel," cried Charlie in a clear and ringing voice, "I want to speak to you!"

Brendel's expressionless face betrayed nothing of his feelings as he stared upon the man who addressed him.

"Go ahead. Shoot," he drawled. "I'm a good listener."

"I want to tell you, Brendel, what every man here would know if they weren't blind fools. Your games are crooked. You're swindling us out of our money. You're ruining—"

Brendel shoved back his chair and leaped to his feet. Like a wailing chorus a hundred chairs were scraped back as every man in the room did likewise.

"Don't pull that gun!" rang out Charlie's voice, and Ren-



frew felt a thrill of pleasure as he recognized the timbre of true courage. He had not failed in his judgment of this youngster's worth.

"If you've got a clean game prove it!" cried Charlie.

Brendel's hand, however, continued at his hip. He cursed violently, and glanced about to assure himself that his lieutenants were closing in on his accuser.

"Prove it!" he bellowed. "That's up to you, you yellow pup! Put up your proof or shut up!" He addressed the open room. "It's the first bad loser this town has shown!" he cried pompously.

"That's right, Putty!"

"Throw him out!"

"He's a squealer!"

A dull roar contained a chorus of derision and of anger from Charlie's fellow victims.

"I say that you're a crook of the meanest kind!" cried Charlie.

"Say it again!" roared Brendel, and his hand came forth from his hip pocket with a gun in it.

"Say it!" rang out the voice of Renfrew.

White to the lips, Charlie looked into the gun.

"I say you're a crook of—"

An extraordinary cry which was rather a bellow than such a sound as a man might make burst from Brendel's throat as Renfrew seized his gun and dragged it down to the side of his own hip.

"Go on!" cried Renfrew.

"Of the meanest sort!" cried Charlie, and Renfrew, with Brendel's gun wrenched free, had drawn another from his own pocket and held them unwaveringly pointed at a spot beyond Charlie's head.

"Don't draw them!" he commanded; upon which Wertheimer and Connors lifted their arms high, for they pos-

sessed less courage than Charlie had in the face of a loaded gun.

"Stick up your hands, Brendel, and get out there where I can shoot you if I want to," commanded Renfrew. And, his order obeyed so that the three gamblers now stared fearfully at his weapons, he bespoke the men of Ledbitter.

"I'm going to show you something now, men," he said. "I'm going to show you that this youngster here spoke the truth. Like you, he is the victim of the smoothest bunch of crooks who ever victimized a community; but unlike you, he had the nerve to challenge them at their own game. Charlie, just run your hand around the waistband of the trousers these gentlemen are wearing. Keep those hands in the air!"

Charlie did as he was told despite the fury of the men with whom he took that liberty, and obtained from his search a number of neatly hidden face cards and aces. The crowd which saw him lay the cards on the table greeted that revelation with a deathly and ominous silence.

"Is that enough?" asked Renfrew, and then, as he saw a tall figure moving toward the door, "Just a minute, Mr. Laurens!" he cried. "I want to know if that's enough?"

Laurens stood in the doorway and scowled at him in perplexity.

"Yes," he growled. "That's enough."

"All right," grinned Renfrew. "Now I'm not going to hold these guns in my hand until morning. If you'll examine the cards you've been playing with for the last two months you'll find them all carefully marked, and I could tell you a few other methods they've used to cheat you. As it is, I think you have enough evidence to know that Charlie was right. Now if you take my advice, you'll elect two committees. One will see these gentlemen to a train and be sure they stay on it until they're well out of town, and the

other will collect all their funds before they go and see that they're divided as fairly as possible among the victims of the occasion. Then all of you, if you have any intelligence, will see that you get a new sheriff just as quickly as possible. And now, gentlemen, if you'll take care of the prisoners, I'll wish you all a very good night."

He lowered his guns and, as though he had given a signal, the room moved forward as one man, closing in on the miserable gamblers.

"Just a minute," snapped Renfrew, and silence fell. "I give these men into your keeping on the clear understanding that no violence is done upon them. Where's your committee?"

A clamor followed, and out of it was produced a committee, four stalwart miners whose grim faces and honest bearing made them acceptable to Renfrew.

"All right," he said. "I give them into your hands. Remember that you are Canadians and that you stand for justice."

He slipped the two guns into his pockets and smiling brightly upon the crestfallen face of Brendel, who had known just how to handle a Mounted Policeman out of uniform, he again left the Palace of Pleasure, and again sought his room at the Garland House. Here he undressed and was about to turn out his light, when discretion reminded him of valor's better part, and he saw to the lock of his door. Not content with that, he had begun to draw the bureau across the doorway when a step in the hallway outside caused him to unlock the door and withdraw to the chair which bore his clothing and, in the pocket of his coat, a pistol.

"Come in!" he called, as the footsteps reached his door. The door opened, and Charlie appeared.

"I was going to bed," said Renfrew, simply.

"Yes, I know, and I'm sorry to disturb you, but I want to tell you—" The poor fellow stopped short, at a loss for words.

"You did splendidly," said Renfrew. "No seasoned man could have done better. It was hard."

"Yes," gulped the youngster. "It was hard. But I want to thank you, and, Lord, I know I don't deserve it. It was all your doing, and I don't see how I'm rightly going to live up to it."

Then his face cleared. There came again to his eyes that glint of courage and of resolution.

"I'll just remember you," he said. "And what you told me. 'There ain't no man can live forever.' That'll help me see it through."

"See what through?" asked Renfrew.

"What's right," said Charlie, his face aflame with high spirit. "They're makin' me the sheriff of Ledbitter."

## CHAPTER XLIII

### SCOTTY WORKS HIS WAY

SIX days after Renfrew left Sagrinay to make his slate clean in the case of The Crown against John Barto, Scott McLeod and Dick Ranney clattered in from the paddock to run a tutor to earth. The tutor was a mild, blond young man named Tavistock, and when the boys bore down upon him where he sat at the writing table in the long gray room, he looked up with unruffled calm and spoke sarcastically.

"You mustn't waste time like this," he said. "Surely all the horses aren't tired yet?" And then he grinned in a quiet way which he had, because he had not yet grown too old to catch such an enthusiasm as Dick and Scotty now radiated upon him.

"We want to take an examination!" said Scotty.

"No need," grinned Tavistock. "You can pass as physically fit without it."

"But the mind, Mr. Tavistock," reproved Dick. "Surely we cannot stop short at the mere physical aspects of life. Think of our brilliant young minds!"

"It is hard to think of what does not exist," sighed Tavistock. "What's the examination you speak of? Equitation?"

"No," said Scotty. "It's this." And he slapped down on the table before the astonished gaze of Mr. Tavistock an obviously unopened booklet of "Examination Questions for College Entrance Requirements in Third-Year English."



Dick slid another one beside it: "Examinations for College Entrance Requirements in Third-Year Latin."

"Is it a joke?" murmured Mr. Tavistock. "You chaps couldn't possibly answer these questions, you know, because you're not through half the work that's necessary to prepare for 'em."

"Probably not the Latin," grinned Dick. "Though we're willing to make a stab at it. But I want to tell you that we can handle anything which that English exam contains."

"But I haven't even taken you into the elements of rhetoric," said Tavistock pleasantly.

"No, but we've gone through it, anyway," said Scotty. "You see, Mr. Tavistock, we've got to have a holiday. Renfrew's over in British Columbia, and he's up against the hardest and most dangerous sort of a job. We can't stay here and wait for him, because—well, I'll tell you, Mr. Tavistock—there's a darned good chance that he might . . . he might not get back!"

The three of them were held silent for a moment, and they stared at each other, electrified by the sound of Scotty's voice.

"So we got hold of the requirements," continued Scotty rapidly. "And we've been going way ahead of what you've given us. You see there's really no reason why we should hold back. We're not in school and there's nothing in the rhetoric or composition book that a man can't read and remember and practice just as fast as his mind will take it. We've plowed ahead as rapidly as we could, and I'll bet we can make that exam. We've done the same with the Latin; just gone ahead on our own. We darned near know the whole book by heart. What we want you to do is to let us take that exam, and if we pass at all decently, let's get away and join Renfrew! It means . . ."

"A lot!" said Dick.

Tavistock was staring at them with more emotion in his eyes than had shone there in all his life. He was deeply moved.

"And when are you going to be ready for this business?" he asked gruffly.

"Now!" snapped both the boys together.

"Then," said Mr. Tavistock, striving desperately to keep steady a voice which badly betrayed him, "dig out your foolscap paper, and sit down and plug. You'll have to do it on the honor system, for I'm hanged if I'm going to let you spoil my afternoon."

He stood in a sort of trance while the two boys produced the writing material, and then he opened one of the books and marked the questions he would have them answer. He set the book before them, and stood, hovering above them for a moment, amazed at the swift plunge they took into a sea of concentration. When he slipped from the room they did not notice his withdrawal.

The elder Ranney was busy about his stables and his barns when Tavistock found him out.

"What is it, Mr. Tavistock?" demanded he; for he had a firm conviction that school-teachers could be up to no good in the surroundings of a barnyard. "Are the boys shirking their work?"

"The work which I give them, yes," murmured Mr. Tavistock quietly. "Listen to this." He gave a colorful picture of the astonishing thing which had happened to him.

Ranney's eyes shone exceedingly while he listened.

"That McLeod kid is one of the best," he said. "One of the best, Tavistock. I hope they will pass your examinations, and if they do not, I shall have to look about for another tutor. In the meantime, I warn you that they are leaving for British Columbia on the night train, to-night. For I shall have to have them with me."

Tavistock smiled leniently.

"If they do not pass that examination, Mr. Ranney," he said, "you will certainly have to look about for another tutor. If they do pass, however, you must do likewise, for I am going to Regina to-morrow, and enlist in the Mounted Police."

## CHAPTER XLIV

### THE VOICE ON THE WIRE

**R**ENFREW had come to Ledbitter to capture Barto; and he had now been there for seven days.

Since Renfrew's most ominous difficulty had lain in the virtual impossibility of capturing Barto without the aid of the local authorities, and since events had given him a sheriff who was devoted to him to the death if need be, one would have thought Renfrew had cause to be cheerful. But he was not cheerful. He was not cheerful because, while he now was in a position to arrest his man with ease and security, he had not yet been able to find Barto.

There was a satisfaction, however, in having the hearty and close coöperation of Sheriff Charlie Mordaunt, who worked so tirelessly in the search for Barto as practically to put the local arm of the law completely at the disposal of the Mounted Police.

"How did they find out in Regina that Barto was here?" he asked Renfrew one morning.

"Hurley, the manager at the Burden Mine, wrote and reported that he had employed a man of that description."

"Well, can't Hurley tell you where he is now?"

"Hurley's pretty close to Oblinger, so I haven't been able to question him outright."

"But if he reported to headquarters he must be willing to play in with the police."

"Not necessarily. He reported Barto's presence here so as to have a claim on part of the reward offered for his arrest. But he's very thick with Oblinger, and we threw

Oblinger out of the very office you're filling now. He'd do anything to ruin me, and would love to find out what I'm here for. So I don't want any of his crowd to know my business until I get my man."

"Then how are you going to find out?"

"By lying low. That's why I don't want you to be too drastic for the present in cleaning up the town. I know Barto's here somewhere, because I've had it from three sources that he is sometimes seen around the mines. He hasn't worked there since two weeks ago. That's because he made enough to live on for a while and doesn't want to take chances. He comes in to get grub occasionally, and I'm betting that if I wait long enough he'll turn up. There's no use going into the mountains after him unless we're driven to. You just keep your three men out at the Company's store, and I think we'll get him." He stared moodily through the window and across the dingy street. "It's hard work, waiting," he said.

Mordaunt, youthful, keen in his new-won honors, came to his side.

"Say the word, Doug, just say the word, and I'll track this black bird into the mountains alone or right beside you. You know that."

Renfrew grinned.

"I know it," he said. "But the game is to wait. I know it. I'm sure of it. Although if it wasn't for that Oblinger crowd, I believe I'd have had him before now."

Mordaunt frowned, and gazed at Renfrew's face in hesitation.

"I hate to say this," he said finally. "It sounds sort of timid, I guess. But it's you I'm thinking of. Mint Oblinger is laying for you, Doug. He's a mean character, and you just ruined him, turning the crowd against him in the way you did. He ain't forgetting that."



Renfrew grinned.

"He's yellow, Charlie. Don't you ever consider for a minute what a man of his kind may do in the way of biting when your back is turned, or you'll walk in fear all your life. Just ignore him and take your chances. A man *must* be free of fear."

"But it was you—"

"I know," Renfrew laid a hand on the other's shoulder. "But don't waste time looking for trouble. Deal with the job in hand and be ready for anything. You know what I said—"

Mordaunt grinned and nodded.

"Sure. No man can live forever."

"That's the stuff. A day is an extremely important period of time. That's why I hate this waiting."

Renfrew wasn't deaf to Mordaunt's warning, however, and when he met Mint Oblinger, the deposed sheriff, in the dim alleyway which approached the Garland House from the side street in which the sheriff's office lay, he was not surprised at what the ruined grafter said.

"I want to speak to you!" Oblinger's voice was thick, like that of a man who has been drinking heavily, or who is furious to the limit of his control. "Don't try to get away."

Renfrew paused, and faced the man. He saw that Oblinger's long, puffy face was unwholesomely white, and he guessed that the man was intensely agitated.

"Make it short," he said.

"Oh, I'll make it short," said Oblinger. "This is all I gotta say to you. Get out of this town. If you know what's good for you, get out. I'm tired of seeing you 'round here. We're all tired of seeing you 'round here. You get out while you're still healthy!"

Renfrew smiled slowly.

"Is that all?" he asked.

Oblinger's reply was a curse which gave voice to an inarticulate fury. Like a drunken man he turned from Renfrew and plunged away down the alley. Renfrew looked after him with a glance of pity. He knew that Oblinger had desired in that moment to slay him, and he knew that the wretched man had not had the nerve to try it.

Renfrew had finished his dinner at the Garland House that day when the elderly and shrunken individual who did service there as bellboy came to his table and made a startling announcement.

"There's a party on the phone wants to speak with somebody named Douglas something, but the last name don't sound like Stewart."

"What does it sound like?"

"It sounds like Henbrew, as near as I can make out," said the antique bellboy.

And Renfrew strode to the phone with a distinct feeling of anxiety inside of him. This must be headquarters calling him, for only headquarters would use his proper name. He took up the receiver.

"It is a friend," replied the voice at the other end of the wire; and Renfrew felt the whole surface of his skin tingle as he recognized the voice of his old adversary, Barto, the black man. Twice, once by sheer wit, and once by unyielding resolution in the face of pain and defeat, he had tracked this black giant down, and each time Barto had escaped him—and here he was on the other end of a telephone wire, saying, "I am your friend."

"I want to see you," boomed the deep, even voice of the black man. "I want to talk with you, alone. Will you come to a place I tell you of?"

"Yes, yes!" replied Renfrew eagerly. "I will come."

"But you must come without companions, without a gun,

and without those shackles which you use. You must promise me that with your word of honor. If you come you must come as a friend who comes to meet a friend."

"Barto," said Renfrew then, "how did you know I was here?"

"I saw you in the town," boomed the voice. "You did not see me, and so I came back to the mountains again. I could have run away, do you understand? I could have escaped again, but I wanted to talk with you first. As a friend talks with a friend."

"But you are an old hunter, Barto. You know how a trap is set."

"Why should I trap you? Do I not take a greater chance than you do? I give you my word there is no trap."

Renfrew thought quickly. It was the only way. Upon his answer now depended whether Barto disappeared immediately, or stayed until that interview he asked for. The man was a savage at heart, part Indian, part African, it might be that he was laying a trap, but trap or no trap, if Renfrew granted this request he would at least see his man and speak with him.

"I will come," he said.

"And I have your word of honor that you will tell no one of your coming, and that you carry no gun nor those shackles?"

Renfrew paused.

"Yes," he said.

"Then ride to-night out to the Burden Mine. At the back of the shaft is a trail which winds out into the mountains. Take that trail and ride until you meet me. That is all. But if you break your word one of us will not live until the morning." And the receiver clicked in Renfrew's ear as the black man cut the connection. Renfrew grinned with the knowledge that Barto was even at that moment in the

town or at some point of telephone communication near by. He called the telephone operator, and asked her to give him the number which had just been speaking with him. In a moment a voice answered him.

"Where is this?" he asked.

"None of your blanked business!" came the answer, and then silence.

Renfrew grinned, called up Mordaunt, gave him directions for ascertaining from what place Barto had called, and asked him to have the place watched. He then set about procuring a horse for his night's ride.

He came to the Burden Mine at twenty-seven minutes after eight, and in the murk he guided his animal around the ugly gray edifice which was built about the shaft. As he rounded the back of the building, and ran his horse up the rock-strewn acclivity which arose from among heaps of rubbish behind the shaft, he discovered the shadowy forms of three men who stood back among the clutter of sheds surrounding it. He would have hailed them, but they seemed oblivious of his presence, and since he could not turn his animal in the difficult scramble up the rough slope, he contented himself with a glance from the tail of his eye which permitted him to see them stroll away into the maze of outbuildings.

Laborers, no doubt, he thought to himself. If he was going to see this mission through, he must retain his trust in Barto's word, or the adventure would be worse than foolhardy. Then, with a thought of the black giant's strength, of the possibility that he might think Renfrew's death would free him from further pursuit, of the ease with which Barto could have arranged for men to follow him and thus trap him, unarmed, beyond escape, it occurred to Renfrew that perhaps this adventure was indeed foolhardy.

"Well," said he to himself, "if it is, it will probably be the last adventure I shall ever know, so I'd better make the most of it." And he cantered philosophically forward.

As he rode it was as though the mountains swallowed him. He soon found himself on a trail which wound tortuously about mountain sides, and extreme beauty was all about him, closing him in with changing circles of evening loveliness and putting the dingy town of Ledbitter completely out of the world. The trail wound and wove like the trail of a vagrant stream, and sometimes Renfrew found himself close to the track he had passed full fifteen minutes before. On one such occasion he drew up sharply, for his horse had pricked up her ears and turned her head backward. For an instant he thought that he had heard the click, as of a horseshoe upon distant rock, but he remembered the many noises of the mountains and knew that it might be any one of these. Still he nursed an uncomfortable doubt as consciousness increased of his utter helplessness before any one who wished him evil. His only weapon was a hunter's knife, his only protection his own courage. He grinned with the knowledge that he must make these go as far as need be, and it was no use giving up one of them merely because a distant stone had clicked.

Then on the trail before him, like a great stone, carved in the semblance of a human figure, stood Barto, the black man, and it came to Renfrew that he had made his old mistake. It was impossible for him to imagine the strength and weight, and sheer immensity of this mighty halfbreed. Twice before he had underestimated the superhuman proportions which made the man a giant, and now, as he saw this figure standing, like a grizzly bear before him, he knew that he should not have come.



## CHAPTER XLV

### FOUR RIDE INTO THE MOUNTAINS

**I**N the same evening which saw Renfrew riding out into the mountains, Sheriff Charlie Mordaunt received three visitors. They were a man and two boys. The man was a bronzed, hard-bitten active gentleman, who looked upon the world with a hawk-like countenance which gained him an instant respect, and the boys were companions worthy of him. They were light of foot, clear of eye, and, each in his own manner, good to look upon.

"My name is Ranney," said the gentleman by way of introduction. "My son, Dick; and his friend, Scott McLeod. You are the sheriff here?"

Mordaunt nodded.

"Good," snapped the hawk-like gentleman. "What I want to know is, how far would you be inclined to coöperate with the Mounted Police if it should so be that a Constable came to this place to make an arrest?"

Mordaunt started perceptibly, and his answer rang out in the bare little office with an amazing note of genuine feeling.

"All the way!" he cried.

"Then," rapped out Ranney, "why the devil aren't you with Renfrew now? Or do you know where he is?"

For a moment Mordaunt stared at him, white-faced. Then:

"Are you his friend?" he questioned; and Ranney sensed a menace and a caution in the question. He learned at the same time that this young sheriff was devoted to Renfrew.

as the boys who stood and hung breathless upon the words which were being spoken were devoted. He nodded his answer, and Mordaunt realized that these strange visitors were allies.

"Then tell me what you mean!" he cried. "Renfrew should be at the hotel!"

"He isn't!" cried Scotty. "He's here to arrest a man who'll fight to the death! And we can't find him anywhere."

Mordaunt reached immediately for his phone and put in a call.

"He called up here and asked me to trace a phone call. I found out that it came from the offices of a mine near here—the Burden Mine—and I'm having the place watched, as he asked me to. I've been waiting to hear from him since supper time—that's why I'm here. That's all I know. Why the deuce don't they answer?" He grabbed the phone and called again for his answer. Then he slapped down the receiver and looked at Ranney with hard eyes. "They don't answer!" he said.

"Who?" snapped Ranney. "Who you calling?"

"The Burden Mine. My man should be there. He's got keys to the office, and was to stay there, on the watch." Suddenly he sprang to his feet. "Come on!" he cried. "Got a gun?" Ranney nodded. "Then come!"

Together the four of them made for the livery stable, and made the eyes of the stable hands pop at the spectacle of how deftly two boys could saddle and bridle four horses. Together they mounted, and, in a little cavalcade, they galloped through the silent streets of Ledbitter toward the dark and ugly mass of buildings which housed the Burden Mine. Mordaunt dashed up to the office door as the others scrambled from their saddles, and Ranney was close behind him as he found it locked against him.

"Open!" he cried, pounding on the panel. "Open up, Kearney, it's Mordaunt!" But a deep silence answered him.

"You say one of your men should be in there?" asked a low voice at Mordaunt's shoulder; and Mordaunt found the towering figure of Dick Ranney close beside him.

"Yes. I've had a key ever since I found the manager here was bucking Renfrew's game. Kearney would never let me down."

"Let me," said Dick, and gently pushing Mordaunt out of his way, he threw himself expertly against the door. Three such attacks accomplished his purpose, and the four of them entered through the broken door.

Two flashlights showed them the interior of the office they had entered, and, in the full glare of the twin beams, there soon appeared the figure of Kearney, bound and gagged. They pounced upon that figure, and in another moment were in the saddle and away with what information the unfortunate man had been able to stutter forth from a bruised and broken jaw.

## CHAPTER XLVI

### BLACK BARTO'S WISH COMES TRUE

RENFREW, approaching the great figure of Barto through the gloom of the mountain's afterglow, touched his teeth lightly together.

"If it's a trap," Renfrew said to himself as he rode forward, "I'm done for. But we will do the best we can."

Barto laid a hand on the horse's mane, standing with his massive head clear of the animal's crest.

"Dismount," he said. Then, as though in reassurance, "You are my guest."

Renfrew dismounted, and the black man turned his back to him, and led the horse along the trail. After a little time he turned into a slighter pathway which was hardly discernible in the gathering night. This, in turn opened suddenly upon a clearing in which a cabin stood, dominated by the great mountain pines which surrounded it as though by a high wall. Even Barto looked small against those pines, but whatever sense of satisfaction Renfrew might have derived from this must have been speedily dissipated when the two men entered the cabin. In that cramped space the black man appeared to be of a preposterous size.

Barto, however, entertained Renfrew as an honored guest. His rude courtesy was the more ceremonious because of its very rudeness. It was the courtesy of an untrained gentleman, a courtesy which sprung from an honest consideration for his guest. He stood until Renfrew had seated himself upon the only chair in the room, then he himself sat upon a huge stone beside the rough fireplace which was built of

piled rocks and filled with dead ashes. Renfrew noticed that Barto moved the stone with no more effort than if it had been a heavy chair.

"This cabin," said the black man as he seated himself, "has been my hiding-place for seven weeks."

"And the Burden Mine," said Renfrew. "You called me from the Burden Mine this afternoon."

Barto did not appear surprised.

"You must not blame the people there," he said. "They are afraid of me. Hurley is my only friend."

"Then you will be sorry to hear that it was Hurley who betrayed you to the police. He is even now waiting for a man of the Northwest Mounted to come and give him his share of the reward that is offered for your capture."

Barto did not immediately reply to this. He sat and stared at Renfrew with unspeakable passions glowing in his black, deep-sunken eyes.

"He did that!" his deep voice rumbled at last. Then, after a long silence, "It is what that man, Lyfe, would have done."

Renfrew held for a while the silence which made the outer darkness seem noisy with its rustle of trees and crackling boughs.

"There is no escape," he murmured softly, then.

Barto drew a deep breath and squared his mighty shoulders. He turned to Renfrew with intense feeling in his voice and in his eyes.

"That is why I have asked you to come here," he said. "And with your first words you have touched the deep wound of my trouble."

Renfrew did not respond to this. He sat, studying the black man, and was content to let him reveal what he would of the queer and tortuous mazes of his mind.

"You know," Barto was saying, "I have not meant to do



wrong. When I came up from the tropics where I spent my boyhood, where I received my education, I felt that I had a feud with white men. The power which they had was the power of gold. It was not that they were better men than I am. That is what I said. That is what I have told you."

Again there was a silence, and Barto seemed quite content that Renfrew should not reply to him.

"Desmond Lyfe had such a feud, too, and it was he who showed me by his crooked ways, his cheating spirit, how wrong I was. I killed Desmond Lyfe because he cheated me, and now I have come to this. Now I have no other company but such men as he was. Crooked men, cheating, lying, cowardly men who are the meanest of the earth. That is all I have gained . . . And I have meant no harm."

The cabin was very dark now, so that when Renfrew scratched a match to light his pipe, the flame illumined Barto's face and gave it the appearance of the face of some gigantic thinker striving for the answer to a problem far too deep. Very quietly Renfrew carried his match to a lantern which stood upon a cracker box, and the room was then revealed softly in a yellow light. Barto hardly noticed Renfrew's movements.

"There was one act," he rumbled moodily, "which threw me in with such men as this so that I cannot now escape them. That was the killing of Lyfe. And it was that action which caused me to meet you. . . . That is a very funny thing." But his voice had in it so profound a sadness that Renfrew shuddered as he heard it.

"It is funny, because now I know that you are the kind of man who I would have wanted to live with. I could work for you. I could fight and die for you. You are a man of honor. You are a man."

Renfrew stirred, taking his pipe from his mouth.

"But where does all this lead us?" he asked gently.

"To this," replied the black man. "I cannot live among such men as these criminals and betrayers of criminals—as a man must live who is hiding from the police. I am too much of a man for that. I should rather wish to die. But they tell me that in your country a man who is convicted of murder is hung by a rope until he is dead. Well, that is not the way for a man to die. I will not hang! I will not!" His voice arose to a great boom of protest; then, as quickly it sank to a murmur while his cry still seemed to reverberate in the tiny room. "That is why I had to treat you so roughly. I had to escape."

"Yes," said Renfrew quietly. "I understand."

"Now what I want to say is this," pursued Barto. "I want you to take me with you, but you must promise me that I will not hang."

And with that he fell into a great silence, so that Renfrew could hear him breathe, and almost seem to hear his own pulse-beat throbbing at his temples.

"It is not so easy as that," he said at last. "You have made a very great mistake, Barto, and I would be less than honest if I promised you anything but the justice of our courts. I can only tell you that it is the code of those men whom you admire to stand by the result of their mistakes. Whether you are executed or not for your crime depends upon the mercy of the court, and they will be merciful to the extent of what their duty is."

Barto gazed searchingly into Renfrew's eyes; still he seemed to be thinking, thinking, wrestling with a problem which he could not solve.

"You say that if you had made such a mistake as killing a man, you would surrender and stand by the verdict of the court?" he questioned.

Renfrew frowned.

"I hope I would. But you must understand that this discovery you have made so late, that criminals and the betrayers of criminals are such men as you cannot bear to live with, is at the bottom of everything a man does. We talk of honor, but honor is merely a code by which men of a certain type conduct their lives. Every little, careless boy who meanly follows the animal impulses which are in him, makes the mistake of feeling that good people are merely afraid to be bad. The truth is that wise men are good men because they know that only by keeping faith with the code of good people can they enjoy the friendship, the love and the respect of people who are good. It is because I, too, cannot tolerate the companionship of mean and dishonest, weak and unmanly men that you are eager to know me and work for me and follow me. But it is my burden that, having adopted that code, I must uphold it, and to gain my respect, to share the fellowship of all who are bound by that code, you must live up to it, too. It is a hard code; that is why the weak cannot keep it."

"You mean that I must surrender to you now?" Barto's rich voice broke a heavy silence.

"No. I mean that if you stand by the result of your misdeed you will have the respect of every good man, regardless of what the consequence to you may be. If you beat me into insensibility here to-night and make your escape, you must put up with the companionship of the gutter until you are run to earth. In that case you will have my pity." And the silence fell again like a darkness, like a black curtain.

Barto arose to his feet.

"Come," he said. "I will go with you, my friend."

Renfrew arose and stretched out his hand. Barto took it eagerly and stood with his great paw covering it while he stared beyond Renfrew's face into far distance. Then

Renfrew turned, picked up the lantern, and opened the door. As a mute expression of his faith in Barto, he strode through the doorway first, but he had hardly passed the threshold when a flash of red flame leapt from the black wall of the forest, and, even as he heard the report, Renfrew felt his left leg shocked into numbness, and tumbled to the earth, knowing that he was shot.

Immediately he scrambled to his feet and stumbled back through the doorway, slamming the door behind him and slipping the wooden bolt home. Then he stood there, leaning against the door, conscious that death was very close, and stared into the eyes of Barto, who stood towering before him. Renfrew said nothing, but his eyes spoke for him.

"You have betrayed me," said his eyes. "After all, it was a trap." And in his eyes, too, there was a bitter memory of all the fine things that he had said.

Barto came close to him and spoke in a voice pitched very low.

"No!" he said. "I swear it! I swear it was no trap! No! No! I would have died for you!"

And there was a pounding at the door behind Renfrew's back. A smashing at the timbers by men who knew that their prey lay wounded in that cabin. Renfrew stumbled over to the chair and pulled out his knife. White as death he awaited death, and as he waited, he promised himself to do well before he died. Barto stared at him, aghast, dumbfounded, while the timbers of the door creaked, near to splitting. Suddenly the black man leaped into action. He jumped to a wall of the cabin and took something from a shelf.

"Take this!" he cried, and shoved into Renfrew's hand a loaded pistol. "And now!" his voice rang out with the quality of a deep-throated bell. "If you think that these men are my friends, see how I greet my friends!"

He sprang to the door, unloosed the bolt, and, permitting it to fly open received the three men who had been battering it, with open arms.

Literally his arms were open, but they were the arms of an enraged grizzly. He seized the first comer as a bear might seize a puppy, and hurled him to the floor with such force as to dash the man's life from his body. The next man engaged him with the desperation of fear, and the third died from a bullet of Renfrew's pistol as he pressed the muzzle of a rifle against the black man's side. Then came a fourth through the door, who threw himself upon the struggling mass composed of Barto and his first assailant. Barto took him on gladly. He seemed to be thrashing the two men about in the narrow confines of that cabin so that the action took the aspect of three bodies hurtling among the meager utensils which surrounded the cabin walls. The lantern fell quickly a victim to the fray, and Renfrew, feeling every minute more faint as the hot blood bathed his leg, was thrown hither and thither in the dark by the gigantic force of Barto's struggle.

Then a man was screaming, like a wounded horse.

"My back! Oh, my back!" and the cry ended in a gasp which seemed to close the sufferer's throat. A volley of curses rang out, and there was a shot, then something crashed to the ground near Renfrew. Something which struck the wall such a blow as forbids sound to issue from the throat of a man who might receive it. And Barto's voice was booming out in failing dissonances.

"I said that I would die for you. I could not do more than that. I could not wish for more than that. . . ."

But Renfrew could not reach him. He could not find his way among the forms which littered the floor. One man was sobbing like a hurt child, but he swore between his sobs. And there were others there on the floor in the dark-



ness, and Barto among them. But Renfrew could not find him.

"Ah," he found himself saying with a queer catch in his throat, "I wish I could find a light. I wish I could find a light." And, "Barto! Barto!" he cried. But there was no answer; only the sound of the man sobbing.

Then a form appeared in the doorway. It was Scott McLeod who had outstripped the others. When he saw Renfrew crawling there on the floor with the five bodies about him, he dashed forward with a quick cry of apprehension. But Renfrew was quick as well, and he sprang at once to the form of the giant black man who lay on his side with the body of Oblinger beneath him. Renfrew grasped the great hand, and pulled up the massive head so that he could see the face. But Barto's dark, questing eyes were closed and it appeared that he had at last found the answer to his problem. When Renfrew looked up into the light which Scotty held, his eyes were filled with tears.

"Good Lord!" murmured Scotty. "Who did it? We knew Oblinger and his gang were out this way, but we never thought. . . . Ah, Doug, we would have been too late . . . !"

"Dead," said Renfrew bitterly. "They shot him before he finished with his greeting." And then with the thought of what had awaited Barto had he lived, he smiled.

"Poor fellow," he said. "And yet he was not without luck in the end."

Then Mordaunt and Dick and Dick's father brought a flood of light into the room.

"Why, Scotty!" said Renfrew, as though he were in a dream. "Scotty! Dick! Has all the world gone mad?"

Scotty caught him as he stumbled, and would have fallen with him, if Dick's father had not supported them both.

"It's a holiday, Doug," Scotty whispered. "We came on a holiday, to help you."

Renfrew, leaning heavily upon his shoulder, with Ranney's arm strongly at his elbow, gazed about on the fantastic scene. Then, with his four friends close about him, he moved to the door.

They stepped out into the cool evening, and before them saw a red moon rising between twin slopes of mountain side. Renfrew looked into the moon and smiled.

"Ah, Scotty," he said, "the holiday's over now. Now we must go back to school again!"

(7)

THE END





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